



# CORDON OF STEEL

## The U.S. Navy and the Cuban Missile Crisis

by  
Curtis A. Utz

No. 1

The U.S. Navy in the Modern World

Naval Historical Center

*Stewart J. Garrett*

***President John F. Kennedy: “Well, Admiral, it looks as though this is up to the Navy.”***

***Chief of Naval Operations Admiral George W. Anderson: “Mr. President, the Navy will not let you down.”***



***President John F. Kennedy: “Well, Admiral, it looks as though this is up to the Navy.”***

***Chief of Naval Operations Admiral George W. Anderson: “Mr. President, the Navy will not let you down.”***

# **Cordon of Steel**

---

## **The U.S. Navy and the Cuban Missile Crisis**

**by Curtis A. Utz**

**No. 1**

**The U.S. Navy in the Modern World Series**

**Series Editor**

**Edward J. Marolda**

**Head, Contemporary History Branch**



**Naval Historical Center  
Department of the Navy  
Washington  
1993**

**Secretary of the Navy's  
Advisory Committee on Naval History**

William D. Wilkinson, Chairman  
CAPT Edward L. Beach, USN (Retired)  
David R. Bender  
John C. Dann  
RADM Russell W. Gorman, USNR (Retired)  
Richard L. Joutras  
VADM William P. Lawrence, USN (Retired)  
Vera D. Mann  
Ambassador J. William Middendorf II  
VADM Gerald E. Miller, USN (Retired)  
Clark G. Reynolds  
Daniel F. Stella  
Betty M. Unterberger

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Utz, Curtis A., 1962-  
Cordon of steel : the U.S. Navy and the Cuban missile crisis / by  
Curtis A. Utz.  
p. cm. -- (The U.S. Navy in the modern world series : no. 1)  
ISBN 0-945274-23-8  
1. Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962. 2. United States.  
Navy--History--20th century. I. Title. II. Series.  
E841.U89 1993  
973.922--dc20 93-35708

# Foreword

---

This study launches the Naval Historical Center's new series entitled *The U.S. Navy in the Modern World*. The purpose of the series is to inform today's naval personnel and other readers of the contributions made by the naval service to the nation, in war and peace, since 1945. During this period, the Navy contained Soviet and Communist expansion, deterred nuclear and conventional attack on the United States, protected American trade at sea and ashore, strengthened regional alliances, and fostered the growth of democratic and free market institutions worldwide. The strength and overseas presence of the U.S. fleet often resolved crises without the use of force, but when force was necessary the Navy fought hard and well.

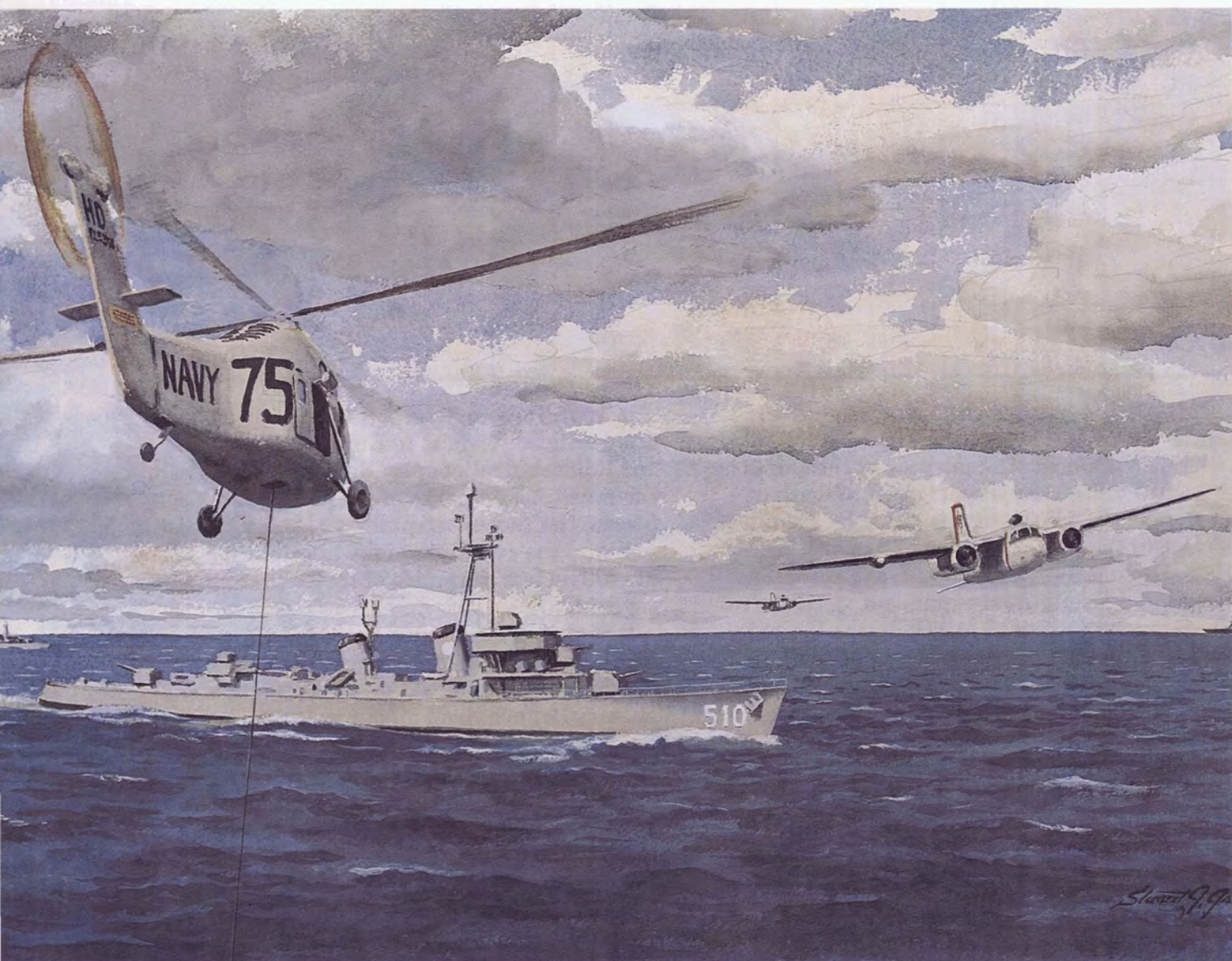
Broad in scope, *The U.S. Navy in the Modern World* series will include studies on the Navy's deterrence of war, support for U.S. foreign policy, refugee evacuations and other humanitarian activities, joint and multinational operations, ship and aircraft development, the projection of power ashore, ship, aircraft, and weapons development, and similar subjects.

The 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis, Atlantic Fleet diplomatic ship visits to European ports, the 1991 disaster relief operations in Bangladesh, the maritime embargo of Iraq in Desert Storm, the Inchon amphibious landing in Korea, and the evolution of naval cruise missiles are only a few examples of topics that may be covered.

It is entirely appropriate that *Cordon of Steel: The U.S. Navy and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, by Curtis A. Utz of our Contemporary History Branch, lead off our new series. His study is a dramatic example of how the U.S. Navy's multipurpose ships and aircraft, flexible task organization, and great mobility enabled President Kennedy to protect national interests in one of the most serious confrontations of the Cold War.

The views expressed are those of Mr. Utz alone, and not those of the Department of the Navy or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

Dean C. Allard  
Director of Naval History



Navy Art Collection #460

On the cover: "Team Work—ASW," watercolor by Stuart Garrett. Destroyer *Eaton* (DD 510), an S-2 Tracker plane, and a Sikorsky HSS-2 helicopter streaming her sonar gear search for elusive submarines in the depths of the ocean.

# Introduction

---

In the fall of 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union came as close as they ever would to global nuclear war. Hoping to correct what he saw as a strategic imbalance with the United States, Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev began secretly deploying medium range ballistic missiles (MRBM) and intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBM) to Fidel Castro's Cuba. Once operational, these nuclear-armed weapons could have been fired against cities and military targets in most of the continental United States. Before this happened, however, U.S. intelligence discovered Khrushchev's brash maneuver. In what became known as the Cuban Missile Crisis, President John F. Kennedy and an alerted and aroused American government, armed forces, and public compelled the Soviets to remove from Cuba not only their missiles but all of their offensive weapons.

The U.S. Navy played a pivotal role in this crisis, demonstrating the critical importance of naval forces to national defense. The Navy's operations were in keeping with its strategic doctrine, which is as valid today as it was in late 1962. The Navy, in cooperation with the other U.S. armed forces and with America's allies, employed

military power in such a way that the president did not have to resort to war to protect vital Western interests. Khrushchev realized that his missile and bomber forces were no match for the Navy's powerful Polaris ballistic missile-firing submarines and the Air Force's land-based nuclear delivery systems once these American arms became fully operational. Naval forces under the U.S. Atlantic Command, headed by Admiral Robert L. Dennison (CINCLANT), steamed out to sea, intercepting not only merchant shipping en route to Cuba, but Soviet submarines operating in the area as well. U.S. destroyers and frigates, kept on station through under-way replenishment by oilers and stores ships, maintained a month-long naval "quarantine" of the island of Cuba. Radar picket ships supported by Navy fighters and airborne early warning planes assisted the U.S. Air Force's Air Defense Command in preparing to defend American airspace from Soviet and Cuban forces. Navy aerial photographic and patrol aircraft played a vital part not only in observing the deployment of Soviet offensive weapons into Cuba but monitoring their withdrawal by sea.

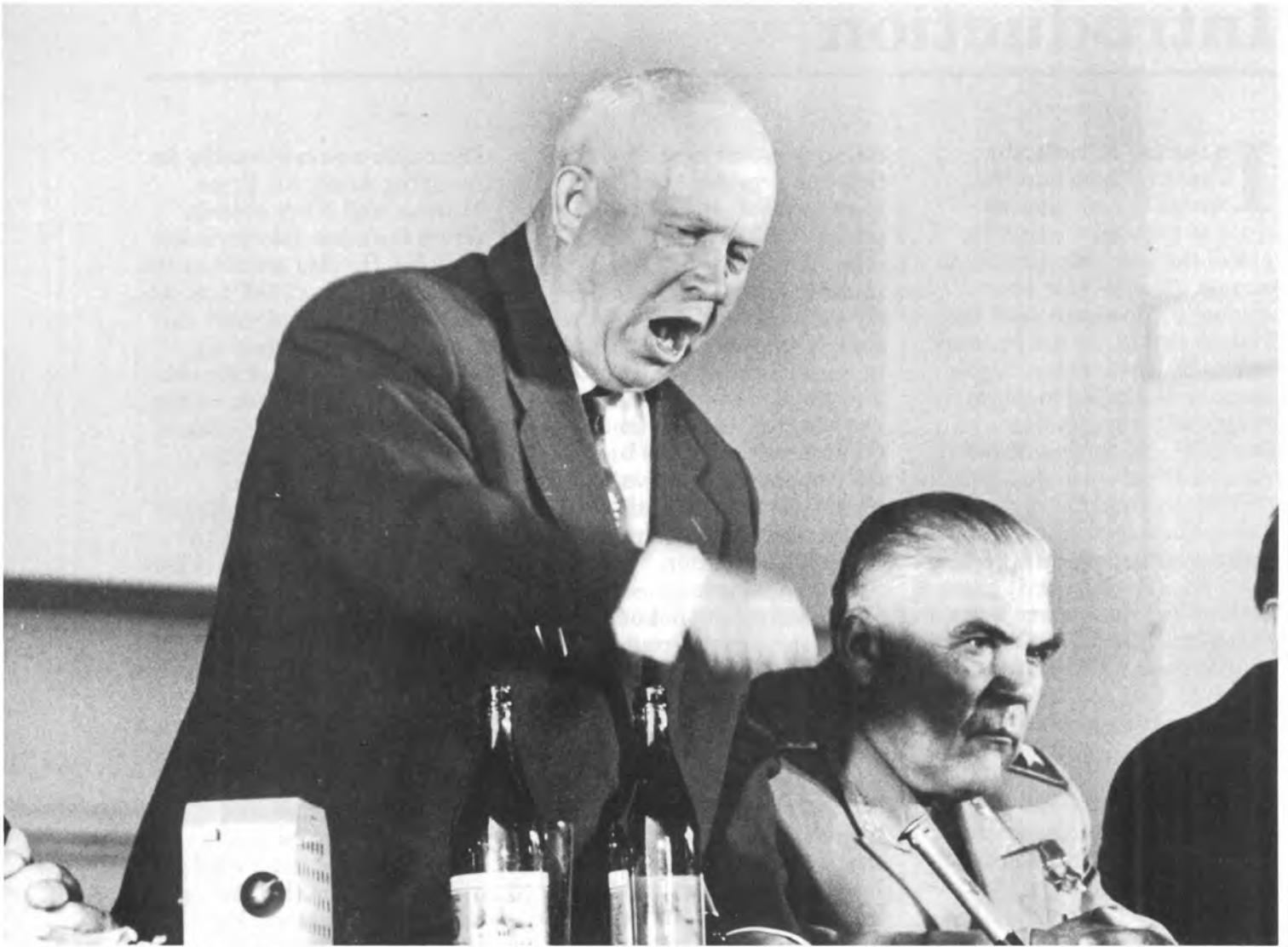
As the unified commander for the Caribbean, Admiral

Dennison was responsible for readying Army, Air Force, Marine, and Navy assault forces for a possible invasion of Cuba. He also served as the Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet. The aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, and Marine forces of the subordinate Second Fleet, under Vice Admiral Alfred G. Ward, were poised to launch air, naval gunfire, and amphibious strikes from the sea against Soviet and Cuban forces ashore. With speed and efficiency, other fleet units reinforced the Marine garrison at Guantanamo on Cuba's southeastern tip and evacuated American civilians. Dennison also coordinated the maritime support operations carried out by Canadian, British, Argentine, and Venezuelan forces.

Khrushchev, faced with the armed might of the United States and its allies, had little choice but to find some way out of the difficult situation in which he had placed himself and his country. President Kennedy did not press the advantage that the strength of U.S. and allied naval and military forces gave him. Thus, the Soviet leader was able to peacefully disengage his nation from this most serious of Cold War confrontations.



# U.S.-Soviet Conflict in the



NA 306-PS-60-5436

Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev emphasizes a point by striking a table during a Paris press conference in May 1960. An impetuous and volatile man, Khrushchev deployed Soviet offensive missiles into Cuba without carefully considering the likelihood that the United States would discover the ploy and respond by threatening war. Seated next to Khrushchev is Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, the Soviet Defense Minister.

**T**he Cuban Missile Crisis was one in a long series of incidents in the global confrontation between Communists and anti-Communists in what came to be known as the Cold War. Relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, allies against the Axis powers

in World War II, were generally hostile during the late 1940s and 1950s. The Soviet Union of dictator Joseph Stalin and his successors forced the nations of eastern Europe to establish Communist governments and supported insurgency movements in the eastern Mediterranean

and in Asia.

The United States, a power with global responsibilities after the war, responded to these Soviet actions by

# Cold War

---

strengthening threatened nations with economic assistance, like that embodied in the Marshall Plan for western Europe. In addition, Washington sponsored military assistance to and alliances with anti-Communist governments as part of a global "Containment Strategy" intended to prevent the spread of Soviet power and communist ideology.

Serious clashes of interest between the United States and the Soviet Union occurred over Berlin in 1948, China in 1949, Korea in the early 1950s, Laos in the late 1950s, and Berlin again at the end of the decade. The Soviets supported Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese Communist guerrillas and conventional military forces fighting against the U.S. and other non-Communist governments. The Soviets killed few Americans themselves, but because Moscow was the power behind international communism and the patron of anti-American action around the globe, U.S. leaders regarded the USSR as their prime antagonist. Moscow, however, refrained from posing a direct military challenge to Washington and worked to prevent the outbreak of large-scale warfare between Soviet client states and the West.

A major reason for this Soviet restraint was the overwhelming superiority of the United States in nuclear weaponry. In the 1950s, the U.S. Air Force's Strategic Air

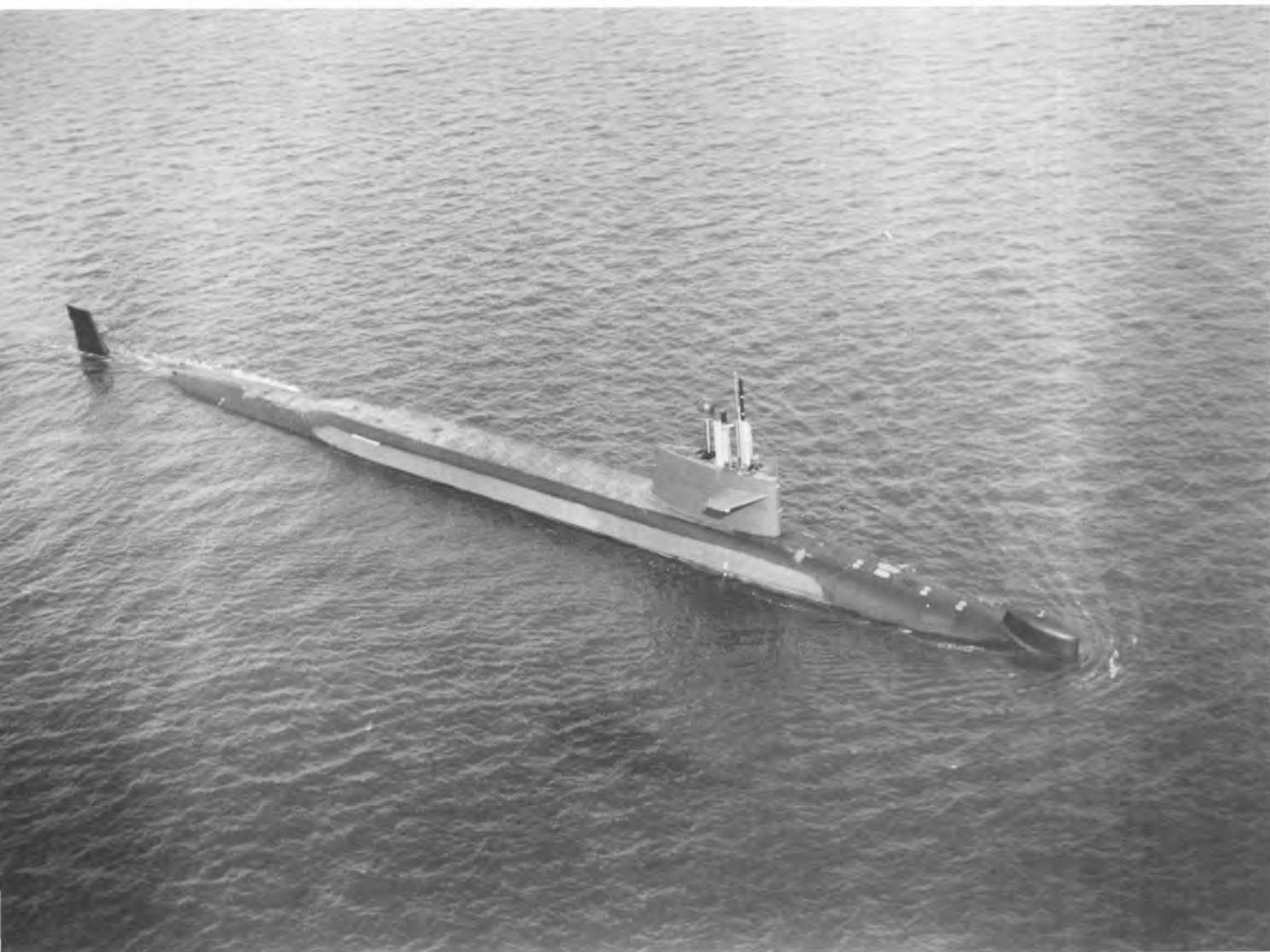
Command (SAC) fielded an array of medium and long-range bombers capable of devastating the major military and urban/industrial centers in the Soviet Union. In addition, the Navy equipped several dozen Navy carrier squadrons with aircraft that could drop nuclear bombs. The Navy also commissioned several submarines that carried the surface-launched, nuclear-armed Regulus cruise missile. At the end of the decade, the United States brought on line nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) based in the United States and submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) taken to sea in the Navy's new *George Washington*-class ships. In addition, with the concurrence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies, the United States deployed IRBMs to Great Britain, Italy, and Turkey. The power of the U.S. nuclear arsenal was tremendous. An American nuclear attack, to quote a Navy officer recounting a SAC briefing on the nuclear strike plan, would have left "virtually all of Russia . . . a smoking, radiating ruin at the end of two hours."

Throughout the late 1950s, Khrushchev's government devoted enormous Soviet resources to the development of a nuclear arsenal and by 1960 operated a fleet of long and medium-range bombers, and a few ICBMs. The Soviet Navy also developed several submarines to carry short-

range, surface-launched ballistic and cruise missiles. In addition, the ability of a Soviet missile to lift the *Sputnik* satellite into orbit around the globe in October 1957 demonstrated Moscow's growing technological prowess. Lacking adequate intelligence of Soviet strength in these strategic systems, some in the American national security establishment worried that the United States no longer held the edge in the nuclear realm. The issue took on national prominence during the presidential election of 1960 when many Americans became convinced of a "missile gap" between the United States and the USSR.

Even though this issue helped Senator John F. Kennedy defeat Vice-President Richard M. Nixon, soon after his inauguration in January 1961, the new president learned from intelligence sources that the United States had far more nuclear weapon delivery systems and warheads than the Soviets. This conclusion was based on the earlier surveillance missions of high-flying U-2 reconnaissance aircraft and the continuing orbits of American intelligence-collection satellites over the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the Soviets based their ICBMs and long-range bombers only in the USSR, far from most key targets in the continental United States.

On 21 October 1961, Assistant Secretary of Defense Roswell L. Gilpatric made a



NA 428-N-1065854

speech proclaiming that the only “missile gap” which existed was in favor of the United States. Gilpatric informed the world that the U.S. nuclear arsenal was so destructive that any nation bringing “it into play” would be committing “an act of self-destruction.” Khrushchev knew the true balance of power, but to have it revealed

in a threatening public statement was, he felt, a personal and political affront.

Hoping to recover from this setback, and change the power equation in favor of the USSR, Khrushchev began extensive discussions with Fidel Castro, the leader of another country at odds with the United States. By the spring of 1962, the Soviet premier

*Thomas Edison (SSBN 610) underway in the Atlantic in 1962. This submarine and her sisters of the *Ethan Allen*-class each carried 16 Polaris ballistic missiles and were a key component of the U.S. strategic deterrent force.*

had succeeded in establishing close relations with Castro. These improved ties eventually resulted in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

# Cuba and the United States

---

**W**ith only ninety miles of water separating them, Cuba and the United States shared much history. Cuba, the largest island in the Caribbean, was colonized by Spain soon after Christopher Columbus opened the Western Hemisphere to Europe in 1492. By the late nineteenth century, Cuba had become the world's largest sugar producer and a key economic asset of Spain. That European kingdom, then in economic and political decline, needed the income from its Cuban possession. At the same time, the United States had developed important economic interests in Central America and the Caribbean, and staked its claim as the preeminent power in the Western Hemisphere. A dynamic United States and a decrepit Spain headed for a clash.

In 1895, long-simmering Cuban opposition to the rule of the Spanish monarchy burst into rebellion. Many Americans were sympathetic to the Cuban insurrectionists. When the battleship *Maine*, on a port visit to Havana in 1898, exploded and sank, the U.S. Congress blamed the Spanish authorities and declared war. Years later, examination of the wreck suggested that the American warship had suffered an internal explosion and was not sunk by a Spanish torpedo or mine, as first suspected.

As a result of the Spanish-American War, known in Cuba as the Second War of In-

dependence, the United States ousted Spain from the Caribbean and took possession of Cuba and Puerto Rico. The United States sponsored the creation of a new government in Havana, the Republic of Cuba.

During the next half-century, the United States came to dominate Cuban foreign and domestic policy. An act of Congress, the Platt Amendment, until repealed in 1934, provided for U.S. military intervention into Cuba to protect American interests. In addition, U.S. companies largely controlled the Cuban economy, especially the sugar industry. Cubans increasingly resented this strong American presence in their country.

The government of the Republic of Cuba was a failure. Corrupt politicians and military strongmen stifled democracy and undercut repeated attempts at reform. General Fulgencio Batista, who seized power in 1952, proved to be one of the most ruthless of Cuban leaders. He held onto power through graft and the suppression of dissent.

One of Batista's early opponents was Fidel Castro. On 26 July 1953, the former lawyer and political extremist led a small band of supporters in an attack on the Moncada army barracks. It was a fiasco. Castro and most of his followers were captured and thrown into prison. Freed in a general amnesty in 1955, Castro went into exile in Mexico, where he formed the

"26 July Movement." Two years later this group landed near Santiago, Cuba, hoping to inspire a rebellion against the government. Batista's soldiers killed most of the rebels, however, and forced Castro and a dozen fellow insurgents to flee into the Sierra Maestra Mountains.

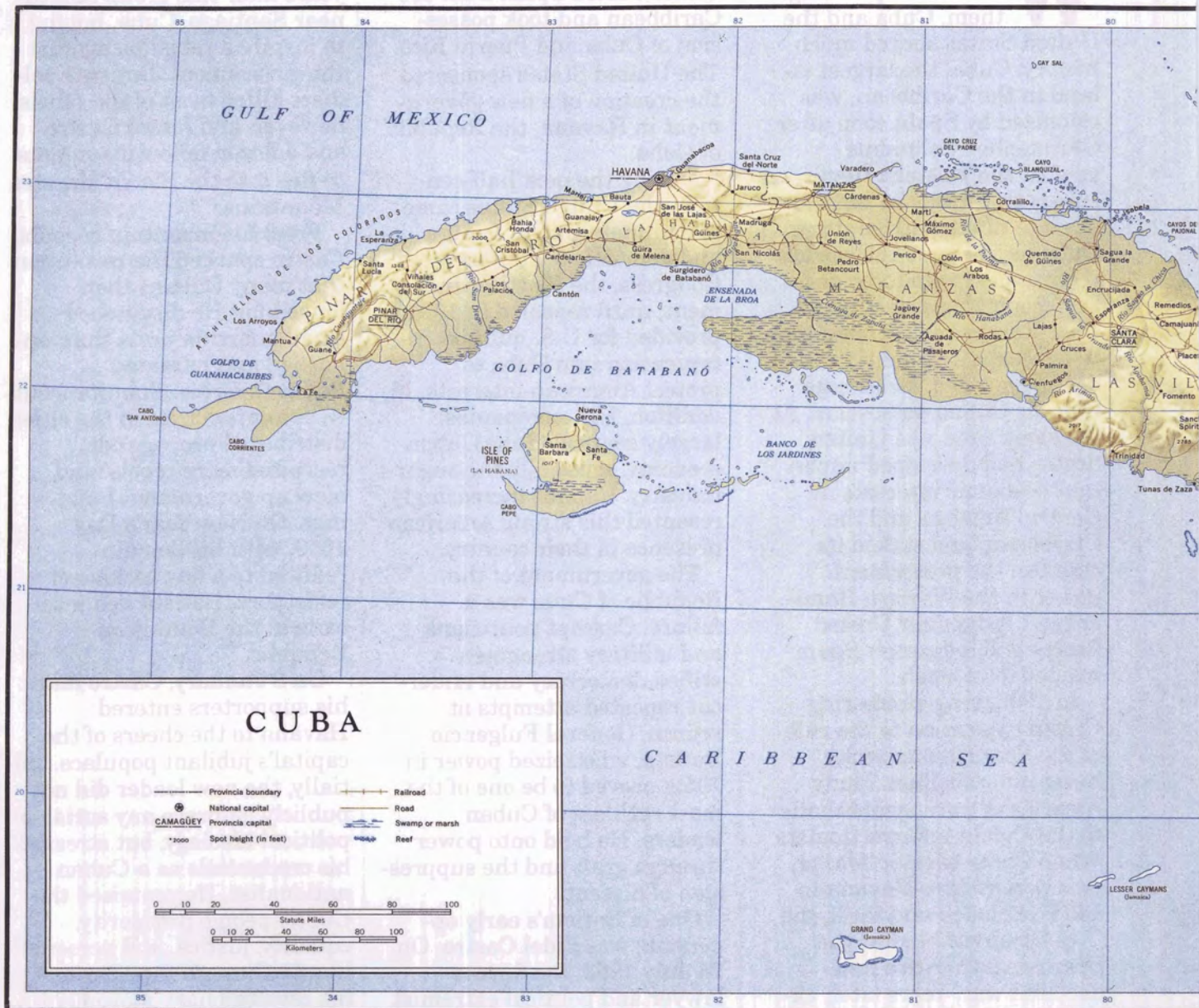
From his mountain redoubt, Castro sparked the revolution that many Cubans then longed for. He dispatched small guerrilla units that ambushed and harassed Batista's forces. Simultaneously, revolutionaries in the cities distributed propaganda, recruited more rebels, and blew up government buildings. On New Year's Day 1959, with his domain reduced to a few pockets of resistance, Batista fled into exile in the Dominican Republic.

On 8 January, Castro and his supporters entered Havana to the cheers of the capital's jubilant populace. Initially, the new leader did not publicly embrace any social or political ideology, but stressed his credentials as a Cuban nationalist. He promised the Cuban people prosperity, equality, justice, and personal liberty through the efforts of his revolutionary movement.

Castro and his revolutionaries improved some aspects of Cuban life, but at great cost. Castro established an increasingly authoritarian regime, suspended many civil liberties, refused to hold elections, and suppressed not only op-



# Cuba and the United States



LC Geography and Map Division





A detailed map of Cuba, 1961. Photo interpreters first discovered missile sites west of Havana, near the towns of San Cristobal and Guanajay. Later, U-2 photography also revealed MRBM and IRBM sites on the northern coast of central Cuba, close to the towns of Sagua La Grande and Remedios.

ponents but even former supporters. Many Cubans were shot, imprisoned, or driven into exile. Moreover, Castro began an agrarian reform program that involved the expropriation of over \$1 billion worth of American holdings.

The trend of events in Cuba appalled U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the leaders of his administration. The American government first pressed Castro to moderate his behavior and when this brought no genuine response strongly criticized him. Mindful of U.S. support for the deposed Batista regime and America's long domination of the Cuban economy, Castro did not take kindly to Washington's involvement. He publicly and vehemently railed against the United States government for interfering in Cuban affairs. Washington responded by placing an embargo on nearly all of Cuba's goods.

Of greater significance for U.S.-Cuban relations, Castro approached the Soviet Union for economic, political, and military support. In September 1959, he signed a treaty with Moscow for the Soviet importation of Cuban sugar, formerly a valued U.S. import. The next year, he requested and received Soviet military equipment. On 3 January 1961, President Eisenhower finally severed U.S. diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Even before that event, the Eisenhower administration began to consider the over-

throw of Castro's government. The president directed the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to plan, support, and oversee an invasion of Cuba by anti-Castro guerrillas. With the endorsement of the incoming Kennedy administration, the U.S. national security establishment bent to the task. On 17 April 1961, with ships of the U.S. Second Fleet steaming just over the horizon, the 1,300-man Brigade 2506 stormed ashore at Playa Larga and Playa Giron, the Bay of Pigs. For the next two days, the anti-Castro Cubans fought to break out of the beachhead. They were hampered by the lack of adequate training, weapons, and equipment. In addition, President Kennedy refused to provide them with air support for fear of making U.S. involvement in the enterprise apparent. Free from opposition, Castro's tiny air force sank two of the invading force's ships, and drove the rest out to sea, thereby denying the brigade

Cuban leader Fidel Castro meets with Soviet Premier Khrushchev at the United Nations in New York in September 1960. The animosity of these leaders toward the United States prompted increased Soviet and Cuban cooperation in the political, economic, and military spheres.

desperately needed reinforcements and ammunition. Castro's ground forces sealed off the beachhead and then overwhelmed the defenders. The survivors were herded off to prison.

Not only did the Bay of Pigs fiasco strengthen U.S. hostility toward Castro and his movement but it prompted the Cuban dictator to openly and wholeheartedly embrace the Soviet Union and Marxist-Leninist ideology. In his May Day 1961 address, Castro announced to hundreds of thousands of his compatriots assembled in Havana that the Cuban revolution was a "socialist" revolution.



NA 306-PS-60-16402



# Rising Tensions in the Caribbean

**T**he Soviet military build-up in Cuba soon followed. As with other third world nations like Egypt and Indonesia, Soviet arms shipments to Cuba came in stages, starting with small arms and ending with aircraft and warships. By the end of 1961, the Soviets had provided the Cuban military with rifles, machine guns, tanks, artillery, over thirty early-model MiG jet fighters, and a few helicopters, transport planes, and small naval vessels.

The CIA obtained much of its information on this build-up from the monthly flights of U-2 aircraft over Cuba. Developed in the mid-1950s to gather intelligence on the Soviet Union and the Communist countries of eastern Europe, the U-2 flew at 70,000 feet, where Soviet fighters could not operate effectively. The aircraft also had tremendous range and

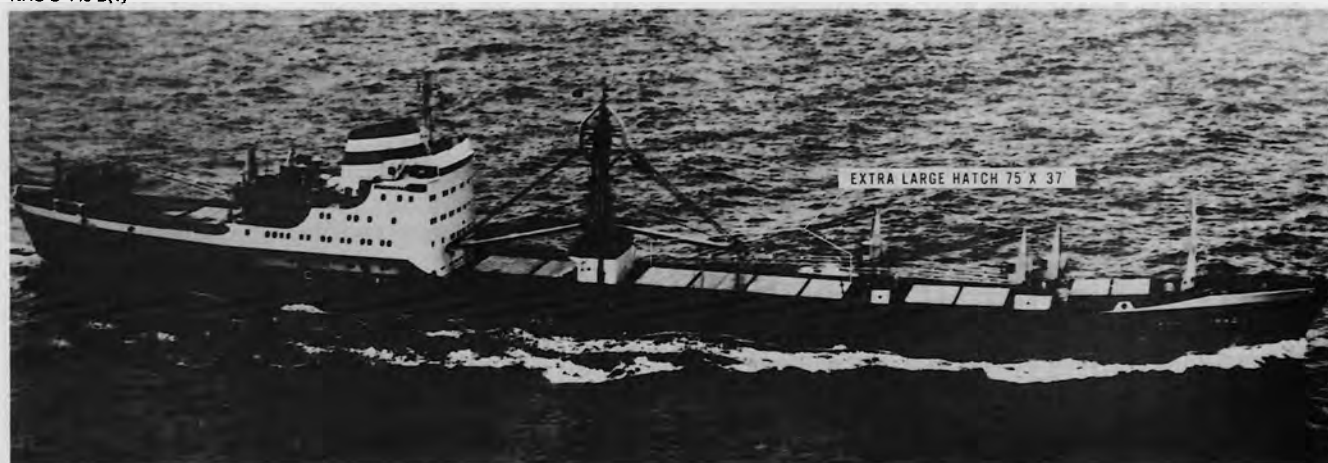
provided a stable platform for specially designed cameras. The Soviet downing of Francis Gary Powers' U-2 over the Ural Mountains in 1960 with SA-2 surface-to-air missiles (SAM) restricted the planes' operational flexibility, but the U-2s continued to fly over Cuba and other areas that lacked missile defenses.

American intelligence learned of Soviet arms shipments not only by U-2 flights over Cuba but through Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps observation of Soviet merchant vessels. Turkey-based Navy detachments and Sixth Fleet air patrol units photographed Soviet and Eastern Bloc vessels in the Bosphorus Strait and in the Mediterranean, while Navy patrol squadrons based at Naval Station (NS), Bermuda, and Naval Air Station (NAS), Jacksonville, Florida, overflew ships in the Atlantic. Coast Guard and Marine

planes photographed Soviet and bloc ships as they neared Cuba. Photographic interpreters often could tell the type and amount of military material being transported by noting if the merchantman was high or low in the water and by analyzing the cargo on deck, whether stowed openly or crated.

American intelligence agents, friendly foreign nationals, and journalists also provided information about Soviet activities in Cuba. Throughout the spring and summer of 1962, these sources reported the arrival in Cuba of large numbers of Soviet "technicians," who traveled under common Russian names to deceive U.S. intelligence. For instance, Marshal Sergi Biryuzov appeared on one passenger list as "the engineer Petrov." These men were sent to remote parts of the island, where they selected and

NHC S-446-B(1)



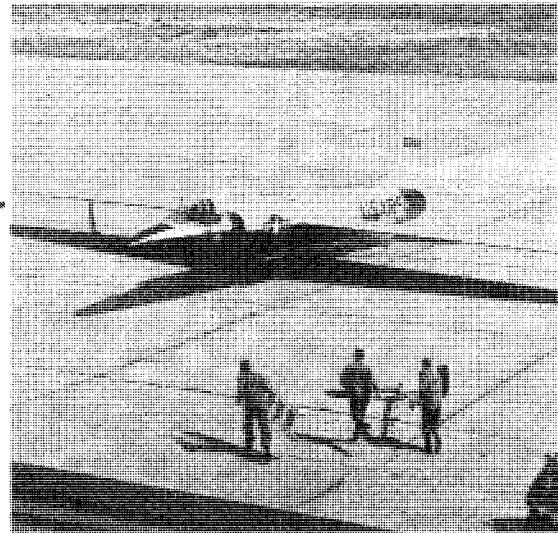
A Navy patrol plane photographed the Soviet freighter *Krasnograd* as she steamed for Cuba in September 1962, probably carrying SS-4 missiles. U.S. and allied aircraft and ships closely monitored the passage of Soviet merchantmen through the Atlantic and Caribbean.



planned missile sites and other military installations meant to accommodate incoming Soviet arms and "technicians." Press service photos revealed that many of the latter were young, fit men with short hair—clearly soldiers out of uniform. Later that

year, U.S. intelligence identified four Soviet regimental combat groups in Cuba.

The increase in Soviet activity, including the possible arrival of missiles in Cuba, worried CIA Director John A. McCone; consequently, he doubled the number of U-2



## U-2s, Crusaders, and Voodoos

The intelligence provided by U.S. reconnaissance aircraft was vital to President Kennedy's successful management of the Cuban Missile Crisis. These planes, flown with skill and courage by American pilots, and equipped with state-of-the-art cameras, captured photographs of such quality that they convinced U.S., United Nations, and Organization of American States officials of Soviet duplicity regarding Cuba.

The Lockheed U-2 reconnaissance plane was designed during the 1950s to monitor the status of the Soviet Union's long-range bomber, intercontinental ballistic missile, and nuclear weapons programs. Flying at 70,000 feet, the U-2s could photograph a 100-mile-wide swath of territory equal to the distance from Washington, D.C., to Phoenix, Arizona. The U-2's 36-inch focal length camera, known as the "B" camera, carried two film canisters. Each canister was loaded with 5,000 feet of 9-inch by 9-inch film. The camera took pictures from seven different positions onto each roll of film, producing a stereo image 18 by 18 inches. The resolution of the photographs produced was remarkable—items less than three feet square on the ground could be easily distinguished.

While the Central Intelligence Agency flew the U-2 missions over and around Cuba before mid-October 1962, the Air Force carried out the momentous 14 October flight and subsequent missile crisis flights. U-2 pilot Major Rudolf Anderson, USAF, paid the ultimate price for his bravery and dedication to duty over Cuba. A Communist SA-2 surface-to-air missile downed his aircraft and killed Anderson on 27 October,

at the height of the crisis.

Navy and Marine aviators flying the Vought F8U-1P Crusader carried out many of the vital low-level photographic reconnaissance missions during the crisis. Intelligence specialists considered the Navy's Light Photographic Squadron (VFP) 62 the best low-level reconnaissance unit in the armed forces, because the unit's personnel were well trained and the Crusader was an especially stable aerial photography platform equipped with cameras of advanced design. Several Crusaders of Marine Composite Reconnaissance Squadron 2 were attached to VFP-62 at Key West, Florida. The cameras carried by the Navy and Marine Crusaders were small-format, six-inch focal length cameras—the KA-45 and KA-46. Both cameras carried 250 feet of five-inch-wide film.

The mainstay of the Air Force tactical reconnaissance effort was the McDonnell RF-101C Voodoo. The aircraft was a good platform for medium or high-altitude aerial photographic work, but its cameras proved less than satisfactory for low-level work. Consequently, Admiral George Anderson, Chief of Naval Operations, agreed to a request by General Curtis LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff, for a number of the new KA-45 cameras due the Navy from the manufacturer. Half of the production run was diverted to the Air Force so the RF-101s could be equipped with some of the best cameras then available. Air Force tactical reconnaissance squadrons with the KA-45s soon became quite proficient at low-level photography.

An Air Force Lockheed U-2 reconnaissance plane. This aircraft, while ungainly in appearance, was able to fly long distances at great speed and altitude. This was possible because the U-2 was built of lightweight materials. Indeed, the wings were so delicate that they needed wheeled supports, called "pogos," when the aircraft was on the ground.

---

missions to two per month. These flights, however, did not confirm the presence of any missiles.

While photographic reconnaissance discovered nothing untoward, Cuban agents and refugees began reporting that Soviet SA-2 anti-aircraft missiles might be in Cuba. Despite the lack of clear proof, McCone concluded that SA-2s would soon be deployed on the island, and on 22 August so informed the president. Kennedy ordered another U-2 mission, which the CIA executed on 29 August. When the information from this flight was evaluated, in the words of one analyst, "the sirens were on and the red lights were flashing."

The photo intelligence confirmed the presence of eight sites on the northern coast of Cuba east and west of Havana that would soon accommodate SAMs. Analysts decided that these sites were the beginnings of an overall, integrated air defense network for Cuba, not just defenses for specific locations. McCone concluded that the principal target for the SAMs would be his U-2s. The 29 August images also revealed a missile site that overlooked several possible amphibious landing areas near the city of Banes in eastern Cuba. A U-2 mission flown on 5 September located additional sites near likely landing areas. Intelligence analysts eventually deduced that these installations contained SS-2-C coastal defense missiles.

Naval intelligence also reported on the sighting of a Soviet-built *Komar*-class guided missile boat off the Cuban port of Mariel. Using the U-2 photography taken 29 August, the Americans confirmed the presence of 13 Soviet-built patrol vessels there, including seven *Komars*. These vessels substantially improved the coastal defense capabilities of the small Cuban Navy, which previously put to sea only a few old World War II frigates and subchasers.

Even these older vessels, however, were not toothless. On 30 August, two Cuban frigates fired on an S2F Tracker antisubmarine warfare plane manned by a U.S. Naval Reserve crew and flying a training mission over international waters, 15 nautical miles from Cuba. The Kennedy administration lodged a diplomatic protest with Cuba, stating that in the future, U.S. armed forces would "employ all means necessary for their own protection." Castro personally denied Cuban involvement in the episode but also used the occasion to remind the world that Cuba's airspace had been violated numerous times by foreign military aircraft; this was an obvious reference to the CIA's U-2s. The 5 September mission, flown over eastern and central Cuba, also revealed the presence of first-line, Soviet-made MiG-21 fighters. These planes had the potential to shoot down a U-2.

In response to this new in-

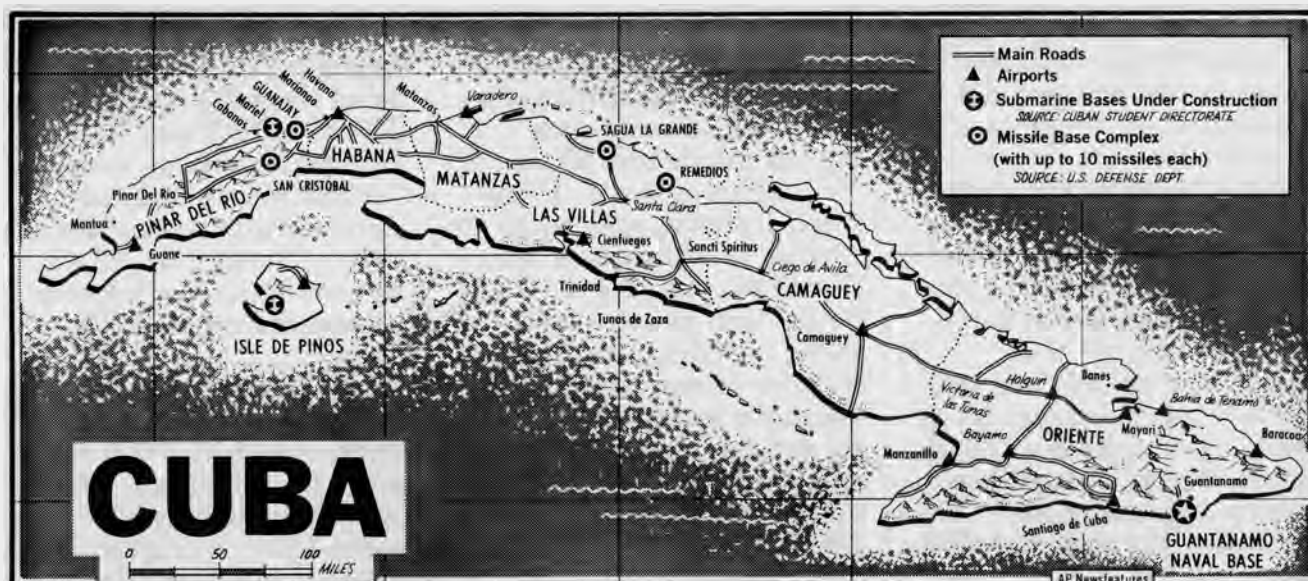
formation, the Pentagon ordered Navy Fighter Squadron (VF) 41 to NAS Key West, Florida. Manned by some of the best Navy pilots and equipped with state-of-the-art F4H-1 Phantom IIs, VF-41 was one of the best interceptor squadrons in the U.S. Navy.

Developments in other trouble spots of the world heightened Soviet-U.S. tensions. In late August, a U-2 aircraft unintentionally entered Soviet airspace over Sakhalin Island on the USSR's Pacific coast. Khrushchev's government protested the "gross violation" of the Soviet frontier and suggested that U-2 bases in Great Britain, West Germany, Turkey, and Japan might be at risk.

U.S. domestic politics also added to the growing international anxiety. In the midst of a midterm Congressional election, Senator Kenneth Keating (R-NY), although having no official access to intelligence, publicly stated his belief that there were Soviet SAMs and troops in Cuba. Keating accused the Kennedy administration of covering up this information. Other members of Congress called for a U.S. blockade of Cuba to compel Soviet withdrawal from the island. Some Democratic leaders demanded even more aggressive action by Kennedy.

Faced with challenges in the domestic and international political arenas, and in possession of the most recent aerial intelligence, Kennedy

A newspaper map of military and naval installations in Cuba, October 1962. U.S. intelligence identified Soviet-made *Komarov*-class missile boats at the port of Mariel and Il-28 Beagle bombers at airfields near Holguin and San Julian (called Guane on this map).



LC Geography and Map Division

responded to the Cuban problem. In statements to the press on 4 and 13 September, the president revealed that the United States knew Soviet-supplied SAMs and other defensive weapons had been deployed to Cuba. He implied that the United States could tolerate their presence. He also stated that there was no substantive evidence of offensive weapons in Cuba. The president added sternly, "were it to be otherwise, the gravest issues would arise."

During the first week of September, Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin met with several members of the Kennedy administration. Acting on directions from Khrushchev, Dobrynin told Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, the president's younger brother, that the Soviet buildup in Cuba was of no significance. He assured Kennedy that no offensive weapons would be placed in Cuba, specifically ground-to-

ground missiles. Kennedy reminded Dobrynin that the United States monitored Soviet activity in Cuba closely, and that the deployment of offensive missiles on the island would cause severe repercussions. In a meeting with Adlai Stevenson, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Dobrynin again affirmed that no offensive weapons would be placed in Cuba.

Dobrynin's communications were part of a program of deception orchestrated from Moscow to reduce U.S. suspicions. Khrushchev kept Dobrynin in the dark about the action long after approving deployment of the offensive missiles to Cuba.

Despite Robert Kennedy's statement regarding the continued close surveillance of Cuba, the presence there of SAMs and fighters increased the danger to the U-2s. At a White House meeting on 10 September, Secretary of State

Dean Rusk and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy argued that the information obtained from the missions was not worth the military and political risks. Even though the CIA Deputy Director, Army Major General Marshall "Pat" Carter and Robert Kennedy disagreed strongly, the president directed that the missions over Cuba be stopped and that henceforth the U-2s fly out of harm's way over the sea and parallel to the Cuban coastline. These flights along the periphery brought back little useful information and revealed nothing about operations in the interior of the island.

Navy reconnaissance of Soviet merchantmen, however, continued to pay dividends. An aerial photograph of the Soviet freighter *Kasimov* showed ten long, thin boxes on deck. Photo interpreters, practicing the mysterious art of "crateol-



ogy," quickly identified the boxes as containers for the fuselages of Il-28 Beagle light jet bombers, long in the Soviet inventory. The arrival of these aircraft was not unexpected for the CIA had believed for some months that these

planes would eventually arrive in Cuba. The Il-28s had an operating radius of 750 miles and the capacity to carry 6,500 pounds of nuclear or conventional bombs. The CIA reported that the Soviets never provided nuclear muni-

tions for these planes to other countries. Thus, although President Kennedy was uncomfortable with this news, McCone and other advisors downplayed the threat.

## U.S. Military Preparations



NA 342-K-1382

**T**he president was not ready to sound the alarm over Soviet actions in the Caribbean. Certainly, he was not planning to invade Cuba as some critics would later charge. Kennedy followed developments in

Cuba closely but never examined his military's various planning documents or asked probing questions about how combat operations would unfold. Indeed, during the crisis he was surprised to learn that if he ordered an invasion,

The Joint Chiefs of Staff in the fall of 1962, left to right: Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Army Chief of Staff; Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff; Army Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Adm. George W. Anderson, Chief of Naval Operations; and Gen. David M. Shoup, Commandant of the Marine Corps.



U.S. forces could carry it out swiftly. Given Soviet activity there, however, prudence dictated that adequate preparations be made.

In 1961, after the Bay of Pigs disaster, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed Admiral Dennison's Atlantic Command to develop several Cuban contingency plans. The deterioration of the Cuban situation brought about the refinement of several relevant operation plans (OPLANs). OPLAN 312-62 (the latter two digits refer to the year the plan was issued) provided for three forms of air attack on Cuba: one for a strike against a single site of a specific type (e.g., a SAM site); one for attacks on all sites of one type (e.g., all SAM sites); and one for a broad, large-scale air assault. Navy, Marine, and Air Force units would be involved in these operations, as appropriate. If necessary, the air strikes would be followed by an amphibious and airborne invasion, embodied in OPLANs 314-62 and 316-62, in which all the services would take part.

Throughout early October 1962, U.S. military, naval, and air forces carried out routine peacetime operations, but their center of gravity shifted south to America's Caribbean and nearby Atlantic frontiers. The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *Enterprise* (CVAN 65) and her escorts returned to Norfolk, Virginia, from a deployment to the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. Several destroyers patrolled the early

warning picket line established in the Atlantic and a single ship stood watch in the Straits of Florida.

Anti-Submarine Warfare Forces, Atlantic, led by Vice Admiral Edmund B. Taylor, conducted regular antisubmarine hunter-killer (HUK) operations. Each HUK group was composed of several destroyers, submarines, and an antisubmarine warfare (ASW) carrier equipped with S2F tracking planes and helicopters. *Essex* (CVS 9), only several days out of a refit at the New York Navy Yard, steamed toward Guantanamo Bay for six weeks of training. In support of the HUK groups were long-range P2V, P3V, and P5M patrol aircraft based at naval stations and facilities situated to cover the Atlantic and the Caribbean. They included Argentia, Newfoundland, in Canada; Lajes, Azores, off Portugal; Bermuda; Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico; Guantanamo, Cuba; and several bases in the continental United States.

In early October, the Amphibious Forces, Atlantic Fleet, command prepared to carry out an annual amphibious landing exercise involving eighteen ships from Amphibious Squadrons 8 and 12, three Marine battalion landing teams (BLT), and several Marine aircraft squadrons. The objective in the 1962 exercise was to land Marine forces on Vieques Island off Puerto Rico to oust from the island the fictional dictator "Ortsac" (Castro spelled backwards).

To reduce reaction time in case the president activated any of the CINCLANT contingency plans, the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed Admiral Dennison to deploy naval forces off eastern Florida. The aircraft carrier *Independence* (CVA 62), with Carrier Air Group 7 embarked, departed

NA 428-N-1063262



Norfolk on the 11th accompanied by destroyers *English* (DD 696), *Hank* (DD 702), *O'Hare* (DDR 889), and *Corry* (DDR 817). In addition, Marine Aircraft Wing 2 deployed elements of Marine Aircraft Groups 14 and 32 to NAS Key West and NS Roosevelt Roads on 13 October.

Admiral Dennison's Army and Air Force components also enhanced their readiness for Cuban operations. A number of Army units heightened their alert status and prepositioned supplies in the southern United States. The Air Force moved selected squadrons, equipment, and war con-

sumables to bases in Florida and its Tactical Air Command (TAC) trained intensively.

An A3D-2 Skywarrior of Heavy Attack Squadron 11, Det. 8, lands on board *Independence*, 20 October 1962. CVA 62 was one of the two fleet carriers involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis.



*Essex* (CVS 9), whose crew is unaware of the crisis brewing in Washington, heads for Guantanamo, Cuba, and a training evolution in mid-October 1962.

This ship was a key component of the fleet's antisubmarine warfare force, as shown by the presence on the flight deck of the Grumman S2F Tracker, Grumman WF-2 Tracer airborne early warning aircraft, and Sikorsky HSS-2 Sea King helicopters of CVSG-60.

## Essex: A Gallant Old Lady

The antisubmarine warfare (ASW) support carrier *Essex* (CVS 9) was the oldest carrier in the Navy at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Ordered in 1940, she was the lead ship of a carrier class of 24 vessels. During World War II, she saw extensive action in the Pacific, suffering a kamikaze attack off the Philippines. She was decommissioned in 1947 but brought back into service during the Korean War and received four battle stars for her contributions. Modernized in 1955 with an angled flight deck and other improvements, she served as an attack carrier until 1960. That year, the Navy converted the ship to an ASW support carrier.

In mid-1962, *Essex* was overhauled in the New York Navy Yard in Brooklyn. New electrical and sonar equipment made her one of the most modern ASW support carriers in the Navy. These improvements included the installation of a bow-mounted SQS-23 sonar, an Iconorama tactical display, and new electronic counter-measures equipment.

*Essex* employed Carrier Anti-Submarine Air Group (CVSG) 60 as her combat component. Led by Commander Robert L. Severns, the air group included two antisubmarine (VS) squadrons, an antisubmarine helicopter (HS) squadron, and a detachment of an airborne early warning (VAW) squadron. VS-34 and VS-39 flew Grumman S2F Trackers, while HS-9 operated Sikorsky HSS-2 Sea Kings. Detachment 9 of VAW-12 flew Grumman WF-2 Tracers, planes which could now be operated from *Essex* because of new data link gear installed during the 1962 refit.

*Essex* sailed from New York on 25 September,

embarked CVSG-60 off Quonset Point, Rhode Island, and headed for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The ship, with many new crewmen and new equipment aboard, was scheduled for six weeks of refresher training off the Cuban base. She steamed into Guantanamo on Friday, 19 October. Unaware of the crisis that was then breaking, Captain Gerard S. Bogart set aside Sunday the 21st as a liberty day for part of the crew.

At 0330 on the 21st, the order "reveille, reveille, all hands" echoed throughout the carrier. The ship got underway immediately, but no one seemed to know why. Radiomen strained at their receivers to pick up any news, official or otherwise. The crew soon heard that the president would make an important address the next night. When a radio broadcast of that speech announced the quarantine of Cuba, cheers rose from all decks.

For the next 26 days, until 15 November, *Essex* operated at sea. Her air department and CVSG-60 searched the waters off Cuba and the Bahamas for 624 consecutive hours. The carrier's aircraft and sonar and her escorting destroyers tracked a submarine contact—Soviet Foxtrot-class submarine *F945*—finally forcing it to the surface.

Even though manned by a new crew using complex new equipment, the ship operated with great effectiveness. This demonstrated how well-trained officers and bluejackets of the U.S. Navy can adapt to changing situations. For their outstanding performance during the Cuban Missile Crisis, sailors and aircrewmembers of the carrier received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal.







# The “Milk Run” U-2 Mission of

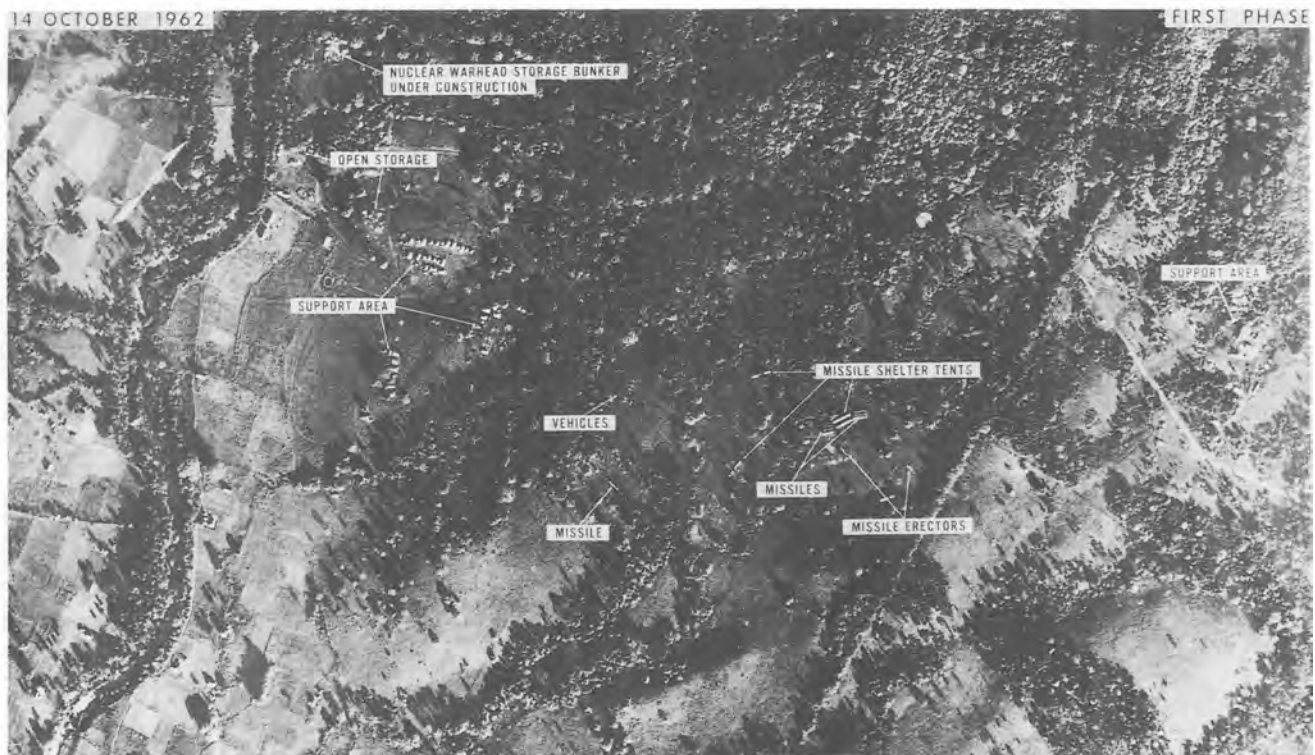
**E**vents in the Caribbean took a dramatic turn on 14 October, when American aircraft resumed flights over Cuba rather than around the island's periphery. For the first time, U.S. Air Force U-2s were involved. Major Richard S. Heyser, one of only two Air Force pilots checked out on the CIA-modified U-2, took off from Edwards Air Force Base, California, flew over western Cuba, and landed at McCoy Air Force Base, Florida. Having encountered no MiGs or SAM activity over the Communist island, when the major landed he described the mission as “a milk run.”

Ground crews removed the film from his aerial camera and put it on a plane bound for Washington. Navy specialists processed the film and the following day took it to the CIA's National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC) for analysis.

In the afternoon, following many hours of close scrutiny, members of the joint-service and CIA team made a discovery that immediately turned the routine “milk run” mission into an intelligence coup. The photo interpreters discovered a new missile site meant for Soviet SS-4 MRBMs—offensive weapons capable of incinerating American cities

and the people in them. Art Lundahl, NPIC's director, passed the information to his superiors at CIA headquarters, who in turn alerted National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy. He immediately arranged a meeting with the president at the White House for the next morning, 16 October.

Beginning just before noon, Lundahl briefed the president and his chief national security advisors. He used the photos to identify and describe the MRBM site located on the 14th. Based on additional analysis completed by the photo interpreters the night before, Lundahl also pointed



NHC S-446-B(2)

This aerial photo was one of several captured by an Air Force U-2 plane from an altitude of 14 miles on 14 October 1962. When Arthur Lundahl of the CIA showed it to President Kennedy two days later, it started the Cuban Missile Crisis. The CIA's skilled photo interpreters, using special light tables and stereoscopes, verified that the Soviets had this MRBM site under construction.

# 14 October

out another MRBM site and another installation whose weapons could not yet be determined. Kennedy listened to the presentation calmly. But, according to Army General Maxwell D. Taylor, only recently appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the president displayed a "rather deep but controlled anger at the duplicity of the Soviet officials who had tried to deceive him." The Cuban Missile Crisis had begun in earnest.

To gather more information on Soviet activities in Cuba, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara ordered the execution not only of additional high-level U-2 flights but low-level reconnaissance. Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral George W. Anderson, concurred with Art Lundahl's observation that the Navy's Light Photographic Squadron (VFP) 62 was best suited for the latter mission. VFP-62, based at NAS Cecil Field outside Jacksonville, Florida, was then perhaps the finest low-level photoreconnaissance organization in the U.S. military. The men of the Navy squadron were especially skilled in navigation, instrument flying, and intelligence-collection techniques, and their aircraft, F8U-1P Crusaders, were equipped with special cameras. Admiral Anderson alerted the squadron to ready a detachment for operations over Cuba. By the 19th, the squadron had deployed six F8U-1P Crusaders along with ground support personnel to NAS Key West.

## Sandals and Skeans

On 14 October 1962, U.S. photoreconnaissance aircraft discovered that Soviet military personnel were hard at work on the island of Cuba constructing a launch site to accommodate nuclear-armed, medium range ballistic missiles (MRBM). This information sounded the alarm in Washington and touched off the Cuban Missile Crisis, the most serious Soviet-American confrontation of the Cold War.

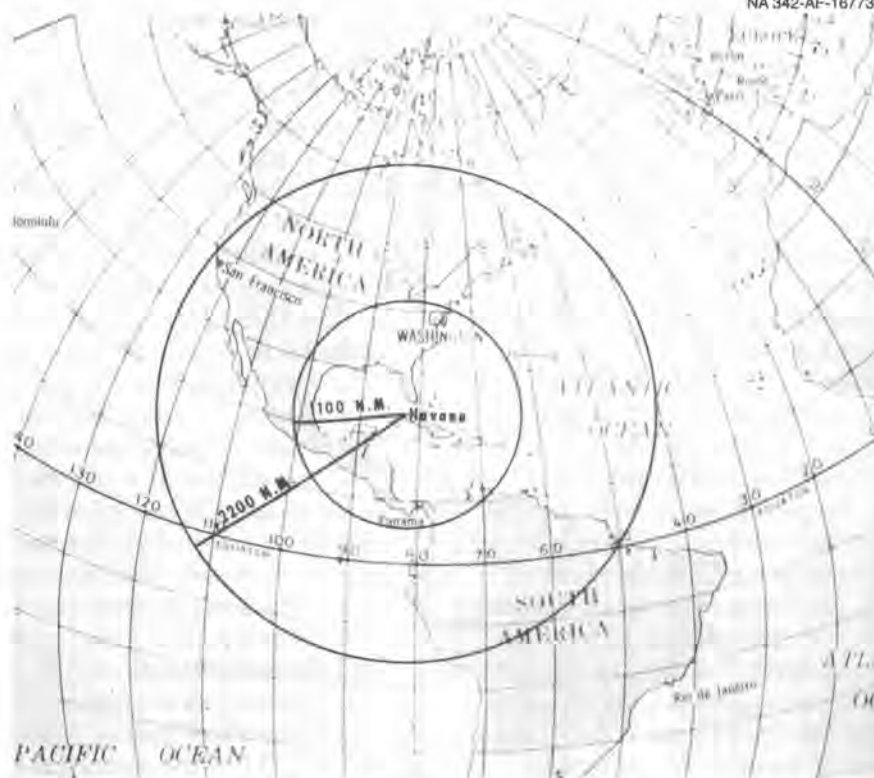
The USSR had already set up intercontinental ballistic missiles on its own soil by 1962, but these weapons and their nuclear warheads could only reach certain areas of the continental United States. MRBMs positioned in Cuba, at one point only 90 miles from Florida, were a different matter. During the summer of 1962, the Soviets carried out Khrushchev's plan to secretly transport SS-4 Sandal missiles to Cuba. Forty-two arrived by October, and intelligence officers estimated that each Sandal carried a two or three-megaton nuclear warhead, devices sixty times more powerful than the bombs dropped on Japan in 1945. The SS-4s could strike within two miles of a target from 1,020 nautical miles away. This put at risk the entire southeastern United States, including the cities of Dallas, Texas; St. Louis, Missouri; and Washington, D.C.—the nation's capital. In addition, the Sandal could hit the Panama Canal, all of Central America, and part of northern South America.

Even more threatening to the United States and her neighbors in the Western Hemisphere were the Soviet SS-5 Skean intermediate range ballistic missiles for which four launching sites (four launchers and eight missiles per site) were being built in Cuba when the crisis unfolded. The Central Intelligence Agency estimated that these weapons each carried a three to five-megaton warhead that was several hundred times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb. The Skean could reach out to 2,200 nautical miles and impact within two miles of its intended target. Hence, from Cuba, the Soviets could devastate any city or military site as far north as Hudson Bay, Canada, and as far south as Lima, Peru. Fortunately, none of these weapons reached Cuba. However, even as Kennedy announced establishment of the quarantine, the Soviet freighter *Poltava*, with launch rings for the SS-5 stowed on her deck, and perhaps missiles in her holds, was en route to the island. Khrushchev might have been less willing to compromise if his deception was discovered after these lethal weapons had become operational.

Several days later, a detachment from Marine Composite Reconnaissance Squadron 2 joined VFP-62 at Jacksonville.

Meanwhile, the president assembled in Washington a group of defense, intelligence, and diplomatic officials, and other trusted advisors to assist him in handling the crisis. The Executive Committee of the National Security Council, or EXCOM, included Rusk, McNamara, McCone, Bundy, General Taylor, Robert Kennedy, former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, as well as other specialists. This high-powered group discussed the various options and recommended certain courses of action, but President Kennedy made the key decisions.

The president weighed three options regarding the U.S. response to Khrushchev's opening gambit. The first option was military: launch air actions against Cuba, as embodied in OPLAN 312. There was a great likelihood that these operations would be followed by the amphibious and airborne landings laid out in OPLAN 316. The second option suggested the combined use of military pressure and diplomatic negotiation, *compelling* the Soviets to remove their offensive missiles from the island. The third choice was a different combination of force and negotiation, with more emphasis on *inducing* the Soviets to withdraw their weapons in ex-



Based in Cuba, Soviet SS-4 Sandal MRBMs could hit targets in the southern and eastern regions of the U.S., while the even more fearsome SS-5 Slean IRBMs could strike sites in most of North America and northern South America.

change for U.S. concessions. After some debate, all members of the EXCOM agreed on one point: the Soviet Union must withdraw its offensive missiles from Cuba.

Feeling Khrushchev had willfully deceived them over the missiles, the president and most of his advisors immediately rejected the third option. The military action had several adherents, particularly McCone, Acheson, and Taylor. But, Rusk, Bundy, and several others feared that the air strikes would cause a large number of civilian and Soviet casualties. As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Taylor was the

sole military officer present. This former Army Chief of Staff and Special Military Representative of the President was highly regarded by Kennedy. Taylor did not press for the military option, as some of the chiefs of staff might have had they been present. In any case, the majority of the EXCOM members were cautious about launching combat operations. No one could predict how the Soviets or the Cubans would react. At this stage, however, the group did not rule out a military response. There was consensus that the second option held the most promise – that the United States use military

pressure, short of outright hostilities, to force Khrushchev to back down.

As the EXCOM analyzed the pros and cons of various actions, new intelligence reached them that raised the anxiety level. The U-2 missions flown on 17 October revealed construction activity in an area, just west of Havana, that photo interpreters soon identified as a launching site for Soviet SS-5 Skean IRBMs. These weapons were more accurate and powerful than the SS-4 and had twice the range. The following day, NPIC confirmed that the Soviets had two IRBM and six MRBM sites under construction.

NAH, Cuba Ops. 1962



LC P&P LC-U9-8639 #21

In the diplomatic arena, on 18 October, the president met with Ambassador Dobrynin and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Kennedy repeated the warnings he made

On 18 October, the president met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoli Dobrynin and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko (center) at the White House. Kennedy was in possession of photos revealing the construction of Soviet ballistic missile sites in Cuba, but he was not yet ready to confront Gromyko with this evidence. Gromyko, however, assured Kennedy that no offensive weapons had been or would be placed in Cuba, prompting the president to later refer to the Soviet minister as "that lying bastard."

in September. Gromyko assured the president that the Soviet Union had not and would not introduce offensive weapons into Cuba. Both men, however, knew the truth. Kennedy did not confront the foreign minister, but after the meeting referred to Gromyko as "that lying bastard."

Lts. Gerald L. Coffee and Arthur R. Day, two VFP-62 naval aviators, discuss aerial photographic operations as RAdm. Joseph M. Carson, Commander Fleet Air, Jacksonville, Florida, listens. Because of its skilled personnel, excellent planes, and advanced cameras, military leaders considered the squadron first-rate.



# U.S. Forces Converge as the

**W**hether the president ordered air, amphibious, or airborne attacks against Cuba, global measures against the Soviet Union, nonhostile activities, or a combination of actions, U.S. naval forces would be vital. Consequently, the Navy reorganized its command team. On 17 October, CNO directed Admiral Dennison to put Vice Admiral Alfred G. "Corky" Ward in charge of the Second Fleet. Dennison also ordered Vice Admiral Horacio Rivero, Jr., to fill Ward's former billet as Commander Amphibious Forces, Atlantic Fleet. Dennison, who not only commanded the unified Atlantic Command but its naval component, the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, also continued to deploy ship and aircraft units into the Atlantic and the Caribbean.

*Enterprise*, with Carrier Air Group 6 embarked, sortied from Norfolk on 19 October. Navy spokesmen stated that she sailed to escape the effects of approaching Hurricane Ella, but the press was skeptical because no other ships left port at the same time. *Enterprise* stood out for the waters north of the Bahamas. Over the next three days, radar picket destroyers *William R. Rush* (DDR 714), *Hawkins* (DDR 873), and *Fiske* (DDR 842) left Mayport, Florida, to join the carrier as escorts.

On 20 October, the Navy formed Task Force 135, which was composed of the *Enterprise* and *Independence*

task groups, an underway replenishment group, shore-based Fleet Air Wing 11, and Marine Aircraft Group 32 stationed at NS Roosevelt Roads. That same day Dennison ordered the A3J heavy attack aircraft of Carrier Air Group 6 to remain ashore. To replace them, twenty Marine A4D Skyhawks from Marine Attack Squadron 225 flew out to the Task Force 135 carriers. The latter aircraft, light attack jets, were better suited to close air support strikes than the A3Js. Commander Second Fleet also deployed alerted squadrons from two carrier air groups in the Jacksonville area.

To help deter Khrushchev from launching a surprise attack on the United States, or if that failed, to unleash nuclear devastation on the Soviet Union, the Joint Chiefs of Staff alerted American strategic forces. These included SAC bombers and ICBMs of the Air Force and the ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) of the Navy. By mid-October, six of the Navy's new Polaris submarines, based at Holy Loch, Scotland, had deployed to their battle stations deep under the sea. *Abraham Lincoln* (SSBN 602), in upkeep at Holy Loch, and two other submarines that had just completed shakedown cruises were also prepared on short notice to add their firepower to the nuclear equation.

Other units of the Air Force and the Army based throughout the continental

United States moved toward their staging areas and prepared to fulfill the roles assigned them in contingency plans. Several aircraft wings of the Air Force's TAC flew to Tyndall, McCoy, and Homestead Air Force Bases in Florida. The Air Defense Command also moved F-104 interceptors to Key West. The Army placed in readiness for immediate deployment the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. The 1st and 2nd Infantry Divisions prepared for action, and the 1st Armored Division's Task Force Charlie started moving to its embarkation point, Savannah, Georgia. The Army also ordered Hawk missile battalions and anti-aircraft automatic weapons battalions to southern Florida to defend air bases there.

Marine Corps units also

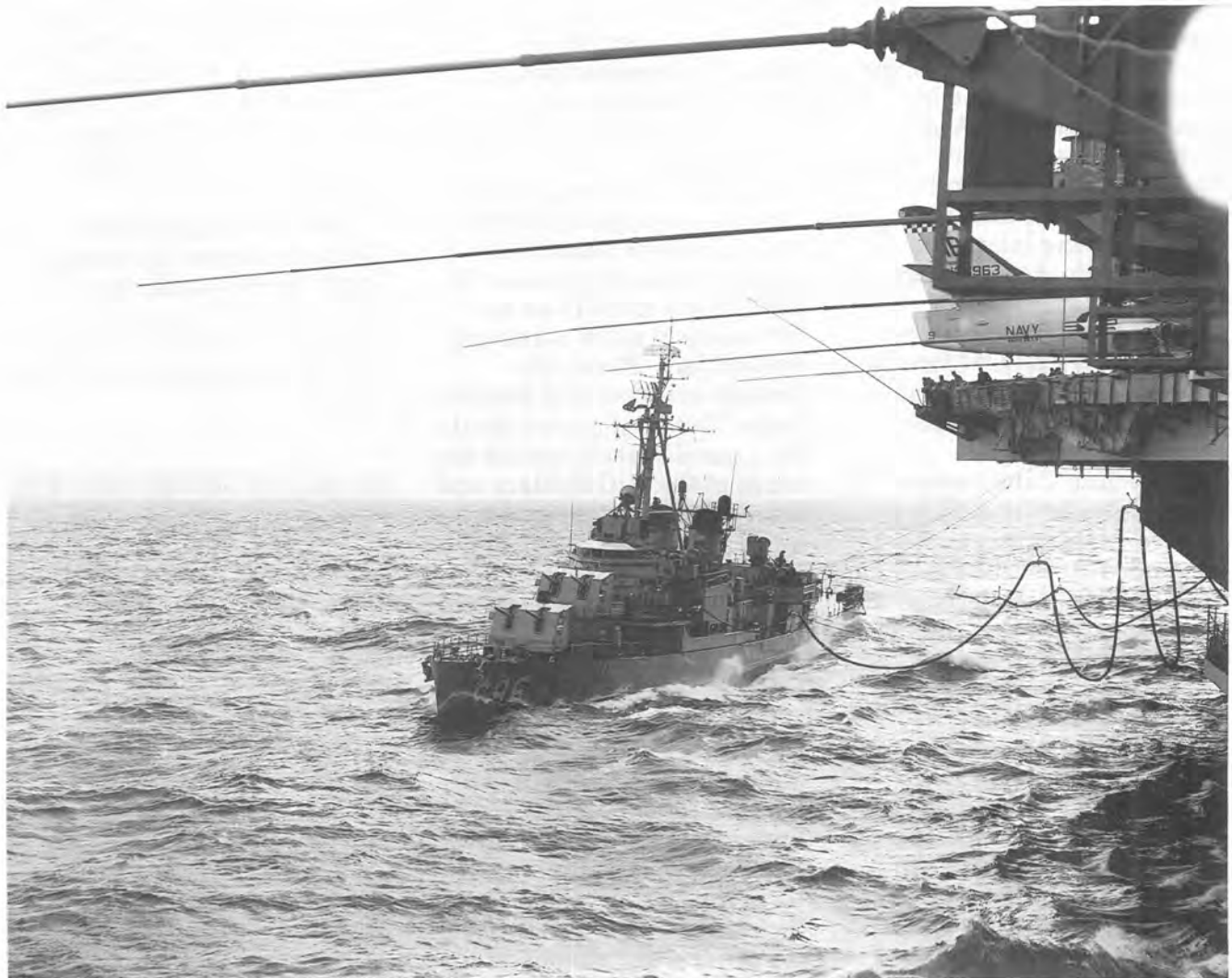
**"USS *Proteus*," watercolor by George Gray. A submarine tender provides alongside support to a Polaris fleet ballistic missile submarine at Holy Loch, Scotland.**

Navy Art Collection #470



# Crisis Unfolds

---



NA 428-N-1063264

prepared to implement the Cuba contingency plans. On the East Coast, II Marine Expeditionary Force, under command of Major General Frederick L. Weiseman, got ready to embark in the ships of Amphibious Group 4. This force included four BLTs and armored and antitank support units of the 2nd Marine Division and Marine Aircraft

Group 26. On the West Coast, the Marine Corps ordered the activation of the Fifth Marine Expeditionary Brigade. Composed of four battalions from the 1st Marine Division, this brigade would embark in the ships of Amphibious Group 3 which would then transit the Panama Canal into the Caribbean Sea. Additional Marine aviation and support units

**As they steam toward the Caribbean hot spot, the destroyer *English* (DD 696) takes on fuel from the aircraft carrier *Independence* (CVA 62). By this method of resupply, called underway replenishment, smaller ships of the fleet were able to remain on station throughout the crisis. Tankers also fueled ships at sea.**

readied themselves for Cuban operations.

To prepare for an invasion of Cuba, if that became necessary, the services held a num-

ber of landing exercises in Florida. In conjunction with Army and Marine units, the Navy practiced putting forces ashore in Cuba. In one instance, Marines and Army infantrymen came ashore at Hollywood Beach near Fort Lauderdale. The men had trouble moving inland because surprised beachgoers thronged the area.

On 20 October, the president and the EXCOM faced a complex problem. The group wanted to prevent further shipment of offensive weapons into Cuba, isolate Castro from Soviet military and economic support, and persuade Khrushchev to reverse his earlier decision to base missiles on the island. As so often in modern international crises, sea power provided a solution—a naval blockade. The Navy's submarines, surface warships, and patrol aircraft could execute that mission without firing a shot. Moreover, no government's permission was required to deploy a powerful U.S. fleet into the Atlantic or the Caribbean to establish a naval cordon around the island of Cuba.

That same day, the president ordered the Navy to stop and search any ship suspected of transporting offensive weapons into Cuba. On the recommendation of his advisors, however, he labeled the operation a "quarantine," because a blockade is an act of war in international law. Kennedy directed the State Department to inform

America's closest allies of the recent events. In addition, he stated his intention to address the American people two days hence about the blossoming international crisis.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also met that day and established several guidelines for the quarantine. The chiefs directed Admiral Dennison to position his ships in an arc 500 nautical miles north and east of Cape Maisi, the eastern-most point of land in Cuba. This deployment would keep naval vessels beyond the range of the MiG fighters and Il-28 bombers in Cuba. Admiral Ward codenamed this line "Walnut."

As these decisions were made, Destroyer Squadron 16, based at Mayport, canceled all leave and alerted sailors to return to their ships. Over the next three days, *Bigelow* (DD 942), *William C. Lawe* (DD 763), *McCaffery* (DD 860), and *Forrest Royal* (DD 872) left port for their stations on the "Walnut" line. Cruisers, other destroyers, and support ships sailed from the naval bases at Norfolk; Charleston, South Carolina; and Newport, Rhode Island.

On the 21st, Admiral Anderson briefed the EXCOM on his operational concept for the quarantine. He explained in great detail how U.S. warships would locate, signal, and if necessary use force against suspect ships refusing inspection. To improve communication, he had dispatched Russian linguists to

the quarantine force. As the meeting closed, the president gave CNO his charge: "Well, Admiral it looks as though this is up to the Navy." Anderson responded, "Mr. President, the Navy will not let you down."

That evening, Admiral Dennison issued Operation Order 45-62 establishing the Quarantine Force as Task Force 136, under the direct control of Admiral Ward. This



RAdm. Edward J. O'Donnell, commander of the naval base at Guantanamo, briefs Chief of Naval Operations Adm. George W. Anderson on the defensive strengths and weaknesses of his Navy-Marine garrison.



Marine PFC Wilbur Martin sets up a TPS-21 air search radar atop "Suicide Ridge" on the perimeter at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

force included many of the destroyers and cruisers that had put to sea during the previous days, as well as the *Essex* ASW group, and a logistic force of two oilers, an ammunition ship, and two destroyers.

As war clouds gathered, Admiral Dennison took action to strengthen Naval Base, Guantanamo, perched on a vul-



LC Geography and Map Division



A map of the Caribbean Basin in the early 1960s. The quarantine lines were both located east of the Bahamas and north of Puerto Rico, in the upper center of the map. The carrier task force (Task Force 135) operated in the waters around Jamaica.





nerable few acres of land near the southeastern tip of Cuba. The U.S. Navy had operated from "GITMO" since acquiring the former coaling station from Spain in 1898. The garrison consisted of a relatively small force of three Marine rifle companies, backed by limited artillery and air support. Navy bluejackets ashore, organized into additional rifle companies after the Bay of Pigs, supported the main line of resistance.

Seabees from Naval Mobile Construction Battalions 4 and 7 manned perimeter positions and served 81 mm mortars, and at least forty Cubans from the base work force volunteered to serve as "second man" on police patrols of the facility. Still, the defenders of Guantanamo, commanded by Rear Admiral Edward J. O'Donnell, would be hard pressed to hold the base if Castro sent strong ground forces against it.

Brigadier General William R. Collins, USMC, had arrived on 20 October to take



LC P&amp;P LC-U9-8762 #10

**Top:** Marine infantry from one of the two battalion landing teams airlifted by Air Force C-135 transports to Leeward Point air facility prepare to reinforce other Marines and sailors manning the perimeter at Guantanamo. **Middle:** Navy nurses, on the staff of Guantanamo Naval Hospital, shared the dangers of service at this American outpost on the southern end of Cuba. **Bottom:** On 22 October, U.S. naval patrol planes operating over the broad Atlantic from their air facility in the Azores discovered the rendezvous of a Soviet Zulu-class submarine and the tanker *Terek*.



USN 1068403



NHC S-022-A Collection

A Navy bluejacket helps Guantanamo dependents disembark from USNS *Upshur* at Norfolk, Virginia. In one day, 22 October, four Navy ships evacuated the 2,400 dependents from the threatened base in Cuba.

who soon were the only American women on the base.

As the Marine and Navy combatants came ashore, civilian dependents headed in the other direction. Male hospital patients, women, and children moved to the base air facility and the piers for transportation to Norfolk. Seaplane tender *Duxbury Bay* (AVP 38), tank landing ship *Desoto County* (LST 1171), stores ship *Hyades* (AF 28), and transport USNS *Upshur* embarked the majority of evacuees from Guantanamo. By 1630 on the evening of 22 October, all four ships had cleared the harbor.

Meanwhile, Admiral Denison ordered all attack submarines in the Atlantic Fleet to load for wartime operations and to disperse to waters north of Charleston. In Washington, Admiral Anderson asked the Canadian, British, and several Latin American navies for help locating Soviet ships and submarines in the Atlantic.

Also on that momentous day, the Navy forwarded to Washington worrisome information. Navy patrol planes flying from Lajes in the Azores spotted the Soviet tanker *Terek* refueling a Zulu-class submarine in nearby waters.

At an EXCOM meeting that day, the CIA informed the

charge, under O'Donnell, of the ground forces at Guantanamo. The next day, Air Force Military Air Transport Service planes reinforced the base with Marine BLT 2/1. On the 22nd, Amphibious Squadron 8 put another Marine contingent, BLT 2/2, ashore. The amphibious ships immediately left for Morehead City, North Carolina, to embark another Marine infantry battalion. Subsequent reinforcement

would bring in another BLT and Battery C of the 3rd Marine Light Anti-Aircraft Missile Battalion equipped with Hawk missiles. Tragically, an Air Force C-135 transport delivering ammunition to the base crashed, killing the crew. The airlift also brought in Navy medical teams to augment the base hospital staff. That staff included ten members of the Navy Nurse Corps—led by Commander Dorothy Eaton—

president of the submarine contact and brought to the meeting the most recent aerial photos of Cuba. Art Lundahl informed the group that four of the MRBM sites appeared to be fully operational and that missiles could be fired on six to eight hours' notice. Work also continued at a rapid pace at the other missile sites. This intelligence only strengthened Kennedy's determination to bring matters to a head.

At 1900 on 22 October, the Joint Chiefs set Defense Condition 3 for all U.S. forces worldwide. Polaris submarines moved to their launch points. SAC B-52s and other bombers, fully armed with nuclear bombs, went on alert at dispersal fields in the United States and overseas. SAC also fueled and readied for launching over 100

ICBMs. All these weapons were designated to strike targets in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Finally, as a precaution against "rash actions by the Cubans," the Atlantic Command scrambled twenty-two U.S. fighters over bases in Florida.

As U.S. forces went on high alert, an unsmiling Kennedy looked into television cameras in the Oval Office of the White House and told the American public that he possessed "unmistakable evidence" of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba and that he considered these weapons a threat to the security of the entire Western Hemisphere. The president condemned Soviet denials about the presence of offensive weapons in Cuba as false statements. Of great portent, he announced that the U.S. govern-

ment insisted the missiles be withdrawn or eliminated. He added that the U.S. Navy was placing a "strict quarantine" on all offensive weapons shipments to Cuba.

Kennedy implied that severe additional actions would be taken if the Soviets "continued offensive military preparations." Significantly, he warned the Soviets that Cuban-based nuclear missiles fired at any country in the Americas would be considered an attack on the United States and would cause "a full retaliatory" strike against the Soviet Union. The president concluded that this "difficult and dangerous" stand would require the support, sacrifice, and patience of the American people.

NA 428-N-1063040

As other U.S. sea, air, and ground forces increased their readiness for war, the nuclear-powered carrier *Enterprise* (CVAN 65) and the fully armed AD-6 Skyraiders of her Attack Squadron 65 prepared to launch strikes against targets in Cuba.





# The Crisis Approaches a Climax

NA 428-KN-5848

**T**he president's speech, soon broadcast world-wide, led the Soviets and Cubans to increase the alert posture of their armed forces. On the 23rd, at Khrushchev's direction, Soviet Defense Minister Rodion Malinovsky put all Soviet forces in a higher state of alert and postponed the release from service of Strategic Rocket Force personnel and submarine crewmen. Castro placed his regular military and naval forces on the highest level of alert and called out the militia, which converged on Guantanamo. Calming one U.S. concern, Soviet forces in East Germany, the Mediterranean, and the Far East made no visible preparations for operations against the NATO nations and America's Asian allies.

The president's address also raised the alarm in Latin American capitals. On the 23rd, representatives of the Organization of American States (OAS), composed of the United States and twenty Latin American countries, gathered in Washington to chart a course of action. Secretary Rusk personally led the U.S. delegation. He asked the organization to support a quarantine of Cuba and to join the United States in demanding the removal of Soviet strategic missiles from the island. In a series of short, pointed statements, the other representatives strongly endorsed the proposed U.S. actions. The final vote was 19 to 0 in favor of the U.S. proposi-



A Royal Canadian Air Force Argus patrol plane and a U.S. Navy P2V Neptune overfly the vast Atlantic Ocean in search of Soviet warships and merchantmen. The involvement of Canadian air and surface units in the Atlantic patrol effort was instrumental to the successful resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

tion, with the Uruguayans abstaining due only to a lack of instructions from their government. The seat for Cuba's representative was empty.

This vote of the OAS, rarely unified on any issue, reflected the seriousness with which the member nations viewed the external threat to the Western Hemisphere. The Kennedy administration was surprised but pleased by the organization's vote. Khrushchev was dismayed. He thought that long-standing anti-American feeling in some Latin American countries would prevent concerted OAS action. In fact, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Venezuela even of-

fered to provide naval forces for the quarantine, and another six nations volunteered use of their airfields and ports.

Canadian armed forces, with some British units attached, also joined in the defense of the hemisphere. Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) elements of the North American Air Defense Command went to the Canadian equivalent of Defense Condition 3 on 24 October.

Additionally, this alert level mandated the establishment of an antisubmarine patrol barrier in the Atlantic. Normally, that line would have extended from Greenland to Iceland and then to the

United Kingdom—the so-called “GIUK Gap.” The concentration of U.S. naval forces in southern waters during October 1962, however, left too few units available to set up a GIUK barrier. As a result, Admiral Taylor, Commander Anti-Submarine Forces, Atlantic Fleet, established a patrol line further south in the Atlantic. This line covered the 600 miles of ocean between Cape Race on Newfoundland to an area 300 miles north-

west of the Azores. A force of ten U.S. and two British submarines, HMS *Alderney* and HMS *Astute*, the latter boats under Canadian control, helped form that barrier. Overhead were U.S. Navy P2V Neptunes and RCAF Argus patrol aircraft. Because of their greater range, the Canadian aircraft overflew the far end of the line. At any one time, three of the Canadian planes were on station conducting missions, twenty

hours long, from takeoff to landing.

Later in the crisis, Canadian Rear Admiral Kenneth Dyer agreed to Admiral Taylor's request that Argus patrol planes take over the Quonset Point Patrol east of Rhode Island so American planes

*Willard Keith (DD 775) cuts through the waters of the Atlantic during 1962. This sleek combatant, commissioned during World War II, was typical of the Allen M. Sumner-class destroyers that did yeoman service on the quarantine line off Cuba.*

NA 428-N-1060432



could deploy to the ASW barrier or to Key West. In addition, Royal Canadian Navy escort ships released American forces from their surveillance of the George's Bank area.

On the evening of 23 October, President Kennedy announced that the quarantine of Cuba would begin at 1000 EDT on 24 October. International shipping was advised to avoid the waters around Cuba. Later communications

established how "unidentified submerged submarines" were to operate in the "general vicinity of Cuba." To be regarded as nonthreatening, once U.S. warships dropped harmless sound signals, undersea vessels were to surface and head due east.

To monitor submarine movements and the flow of merchant shipping to and from Cuba, Admiral Dennison established a Quarantine Plot in his Norfolk headquarters.

Information contained in situation summaries kept the Pentagon and the task force commanders apprised of the location of various suspect vessels.

To carry out the quarantine the Navy assembled east of Cuba under Task Force 136, a formidable armada of an ASW carrier, two cruisers, 22 destroyers, and two guided missile frigates. This included the Newport-based Destroyer Squadron 24, one of the

## Willard Keith: Destroyer on the Quarantine Line

**D**uring the Cuban Missile Crisis, 20 or more U.S. Navy destroyers served on the two quarantine lines, "Walnut" and "Chestnut," as part of Task Group 136.1. Of these ships, 14 were either *Allen M. Sumner* (DD 692) or *Gearing* (DD 710)-class destroyers.

Both classes were built as part of the 2,200-ton destroyer program of 1942. The ships were capable of 32 knots. They originally carried six dual-purpose, 5-inch guns, 10 21-inch torpedo tubes, two stern racks and six side launchers for depth charges, and 12 40mm and 11 20mm antiaircraft guns. The only substantial difference between the two destroyer types was the greater length of the *Gearing* class, which allowed them increased fuel storage and, therefore, greater range.

Ships of these two classes formed the core of the Navy's destroyer force during the decade after World War II. The Navy continued to improve these vessels throughout their service life. *Willard Keith* (DD 775), pictured here in early 1962, displays the changes made during the 1950s. She retains all of her 5-inch guns, but six more-modern, 3-inch, rapid-fire guns have replaced her 20mm and 40mm antiaircraft guns. Only one stern rack of fast-sinking depth char-

ges remains of her earlier antisubmarine weapons suite, but two new fixed Hedgehog projectors have been installed on both sides of gun mount 52. The ship also carries a pair of Mark 32 lightweight, triple-tube antisubmarine weapons placed between the stacks (hidden in this photo by the support for the starboard 3-inch gun) which replaced the old quintuple bank of 21-inch tubes.

The destroyer's fire controls include a Mark 37 gun director with a Mark 25 antenna dish for the 5-inch guns, Mark 56 and 63 directors for the 3-inch guns, and a Mark 105 antisubmarine warfare director. *Willard Keith* operates an SPS-6 air search radar and an SPS-10 surface search radar. Her sonar is an improved SQS-4 of the SQS-29/32 series.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Willard Keith* steamed in Destroyer Squadron 22. She deployed on quarantine line "Walnut" on 24 October as an escort to the fleet flagship, heavy cruiser *Newport News* (CA 148). Under the command of Commander Claude L. Tyler, *Willard Keith* served on quarantine duty until 15 November 1962. Tyler and his crew received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for their service during the crisis.



---

Navy's most modern ASW units and composed of *Blandy* (DD 943), *Barry* (DD 933), *Keppler* (DD 765), and *Charles S. Sperry* (DD 697).

In late October, there were at least five Soviet submarines of the Foxtrot class operating in the Atlantic.

Supporting these warships were the tanker *Terek*, a refrigerator ship, and the intelligence trawler *Shkval*.

Because Soviet submarines constituted the greatest threat to the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, Admiral Anderson ordered that their activities be closely monitored. Furthermore, U.S. naval units would be prepared to sink the Soviet ships on command from higher authority.

The day after the president's speech, in the Atlantic and bound for Cuba were 26 Soviet and Eastern Bloc merchant and passenger ships, including 18 Soviet freighters. The freighter *Leninsky Komso-mol* was already well inside the quarantine line. The ship carried as many as thirteen Il-28 Beagle bombers crated and on deck. American intelligence determined that another seven ships probably carried military cargo. The large hatch and spacious hold of one of these vessels, *Pol-tava*, made her ideally suited to transporting missiles below decks. Photographs taken by patrol aircraft also discovered that the ship carried as deck cargo strange rings mounted on trucks. Intelligence specialists soon decided that these objects were support rings for

the SS-5 IRBM.

Admiral Anderson ordered the heavy cruiser *Newport News* (CA 148) and two destroyers to intercept the merchantman and to prepare to stop and board her precisely at 1000 on the 24th, if so directed. CNO signaled the same instructions to the guided missile cruiser *Canberra* (CAG 2), then steaming to intercept *Kimovsk*, another suspected weapons carrier.

By the afternoon of 24 October, information obtained from Navy patrol ships and aircraft, and other intelligence sources, made it clear that 16 of the Soviet ships in the Atlantic were dead in the water or had come about and were steaming for home. Although the operation was less than eight hours old, Anderson could report that most of the Soviet ships would not cross the Navy's quarantine line.

Not all Soviet ships had turned back, however. The tanker *Bucharest*, obviously carrying no weapons, pressed on toward Cuba. As directed by the Pentagon, Admiral Ward positioned destroyers to intercept her. President Kennedy, concluding that Khrushchev wanted to avoid a confrontation on the line, however, directed the Navy to shadow the ship but not stop her. Eventually, *Bucharest* identified herself to the destroyer *Gearing* and slowed down so the Americans could visually inspect and photograph her. The Soviet vessel was then allowed to proceed

to Cuba.

Of a more serious nature, on the afternoon of the 24th, fleet antisubmarine units detected a Soviet submarine, which they labeled contact C-18, 400 miles north of Puerto Rico and inside the quarantine line.

The day witnessed another dramatic development. Air Force General Thomas S. Power, commander of SAC, put his forces on Defense Condition 2, one step short of general, global war. One out of every eight B-52s went on airborne alert, and all ICBMs were put on-line. Because SAC headquarters sent out the alert messages in the clear, Soviet officials knew immediately of the U.S. action. Since Power did not clear the order with the Department of Defense, however, Washington did not know he had taken this step. Twenty years after the crisis, Secretary of Defense McNamara and National Security Advisor Bundy claimed that they were unaware of the heightened SAC alert.

International tension mounted on 25 October as U.S. and Soviet representatives came to grips in the United Nations. Soviet Ambassador Valerian Zorin challenged U.S. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson to present evidence of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba. The usually restrained Stevenson responded, "Do you, Ambassador Zorin, deny that the USSR has placed and is placing medium and intermediate-

range missiles and sites in Cuba? Yes or no—**don't wait for the translation**—yes or no!" When Zorin promised an answer sometime later, Stevenson shot back that he was prepared to "wait for my answer until hell freezes over." The U.S. representative then displayed to a hushed Security Council enlarged photos of the Soviet installations in Cuba. The evidence of Soviet activity, and deception, was clear to the assembled diplomats.

Meanwhile, on the quarantine line, HUK Task Group 83.2 (Task Group Alfa), formed around ASW carrier *Randolph* (CVS 15) and seven destroyers, had located another Soviet submarine. This one, designated C-19, was 150 miles outside the exclusionary zone and although sub-

merged, was heading east. Ships and aircraft from the task group maintained contact with the submarine to make sure she kept on an out-bound course.

That evening, the EXCOM decided to stop and search one of the merchantmen making for Cuba to demonstrate American resolve. They selected the Lebanese-flagged freighter *Marucla*, contracted to carry Soviet goods to Cuba. Because U.S. intelligence specialists knew that the Soviet government did not move weapons in Western or neutral ships, the EXCOM felt this boarding was unlikely to be resisted. Planes from *Essex* located the ship, while destroyers *John R. Pierce* (DD 753) and *Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.* (DD 850) closed her position.

At 0650 the following morning, 26 October, *Kennedy* asked *Marucla* to heave to, which she did. A boarding party of four U.S. naval officers and one signalman from the crews of the two destroyers was welcomed aboard by the merchantman's captain. The American sailors reviewed the ship's manifests and inspected the cargo. Finding no contraband onboard, the U.S. command allowed *Marucla* to continue her passage to Cuba. More importantly, the point was made that the United States intended to enforce the quarantine.

Also that day, American ships and patrol planes picked up two Soviet submarines on their radars. ASW Task Group Alfa located one, labeled C-20, well inside the

USN 711187



A boat bearing a boarding party makes its way from the destroyer *Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.* (DD 850), named for the president's older brother killed in World War II, to the Lebanese freighter *Marucla*. The Kennedy administration chose to board and search this merchantman on 26 October as a demonstration to Moscow that any ship en route to Cuba was subject to inspection by the quarantine force.

## Navy Photoreconnaissance Mission

Soon after U-2 high-flying aircraft brought back the startling information that Khrushchev intended to install offensive missiles in Cuba, the president's chief advisors called for more detailed intelligence of Soviet and Cuban forces and activities on the island. At Washington's direction, Admiral Robert L. Dennison, Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Command, ordered the deployment to Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida, of six planes from the Navy's Light Photographic Squadron (VFP) 62, nicknamed "Fightin' Photo." Commander William B. Ecker, a combat veteran of World War II, led the unit, which consisted of over 500 officers and men and 26 F8U-1P Crusader photoreconnaissance planes. Two-plane sections of the squadron normally served on each of the Atlantic Command's five attack aircraft carriers.

Shortly after the squadron's 19 October arrival at Key West, situated less than 100 miles from Cuba, Ecker received orders to initiate low-level photoreconnaissance missions over the island. Crusaders piloted by Ecker and five other naval aviators took off from the naval facility on the 23rd for the first mission. Flying in three, two-plane "loose deuce" sections, the detachment traversed the treacherous Florida Strait in ten minutes and entered Cuban airspace. Ecker and his wingman, Lieutenant Bruce Wilhemy, quickly checked to make sure their navigation was accurate and headed for the targets assigned them. Approaching the site at 350 knots and 400 feet off the ground, the pilots switched on their cameras. In less than 30 seconds, the jets streaked over the target area, their onboard equipment recorded the scene below, and they banked for home.

The aerial photographic mission, however, was far from over. Instead of landing at Key West, the six aircraft set down further north at the squadron's permanent base, Naval Air Station, Cecil Field, Florida, near Jacksonville. The pilots surrendered their film to waiting photographer's mates who rushed it to nearby facilities for processing. The squadron executive

officer, Commander Bob Koch, also known as "Daddy Photo," supervised the development and initial interpretation of the pictures and later dispatched them to Washington.

Still in his plane, Ecker was ordered to proceed immediately to the nation's capital. Flying at Mach .8, the F8U-1P soon arrived at Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington. A helicopter then whisked him to the Pentagon where, still in his flight suit but relieved of his side arm, he was taken in secret to a high security area. To the surprise of the Navy commander, General Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and Admiral George W. Anderson, Chief of Naval Operations, appeared and ushered him into the JCS meeting room, the "tank."

Ecker apologized for being sweaty and smelly, which prompted General Curtis LeMay, the gruff Air Force Chief of Staff, to interject, "God damn it, you've been flying an airplane now haven't you? You ought to sweat and smell. Sit down."

Thereafter, Ecker described to the assembled chiefs his firsthand impressions of the site he and Wilhemy had overflown. He observed that the Cubans apparently had not fired at his planes and that there was a mass of equipment, much of it camouflaged, at the site. Ecker recommended that they wait for the film to get more information.

The intelligence return from this and subsequent VFP-62 missions over Cuba proved vital to U.S. decision makers. The president and his advisors received timely information on the location, installation status, and later the removal of missiles and bombers from the island. In recognition of the squadron's stellar performance during the crisis, President John F. Kennedy personally presented Ecker with the Navy Unit Commendation. In addition, Ecker, along with 11 other VFP-62 pilots and four attached Marine Corps aviators, received the Distinguished Flying Cross for their flights over Cuba.



Navy photographer's mates of VFP-62 remove film from the cameras of an F8U-1P Crusader aerial reconnaissance plane that has just returned from a mission over Cuba. In a matter of hours, the film will be processed, evaluated by skilled photo interpreters, and whisked to Washington, D.C., for the use of military and civilian analysts.



quarantine line just southeast of the Bahamas, but headed to the northeast. The other, designated C-21, was picked up east of Jamaica by a carrier in Task Force 135. Admiral Ward deployed the carrier force to the shallow waters south of Jamaica where it was especially difficult for the Soviet sub to break contact with her pursuers. The fleet commander also reinforced this force with another five destroyers.

As the units of Task Forces 135 and 136 tightened their surface and air patrols at sea, other naval units carried out the hazardous low-level reconnaissance flights over Cuba. VFP-62 flew its first missions over the island the day after the president's address to the nation. Flying at tree-top level at 350 knots, the Crusader jets and their pilots captured on film detailed information on the Soviet missile installations. Ground crewmen at NAS Cecil Field used stencils depicting a fat Castro and a dead chicken to paint a photo mission "victory" on every returning plane. (The chicken was inspired by accounts of Castro's slaughtering and cooking the birds in his New York hotel room during an earlier visit to the United Nations.) The first words out of the mouths of returning naval aviators often were, "Chalk up another chicken!"

An especially successful VFP-62 mission occurred on 25 October, when squadron aircraft confirmed the pres-

ence in Cuba of Soviet FROG (Free Rocket Over Ground) tactical rockets. Although only short-range weapons, the FROGs would pose a threat to any American amphibious invasion force. Even though the FROGs could carry a nuclear warhead, their existence on the island did not raise undue concern at the time in Washington.

The Navy also helped prepare Air Force units for low-level aerial photographic missions. The Air Force had tactical reconnaissance units in TAC, but their personnel needed specialized training in

such low-level missions and instruction in use of the Navy's state-of-the-art cameras.

The atmosphere was even more charged in Washington that day. John Scali, the State Department correspondent for ABC News, met with Alexander Fomin, the chief officer of Soviet intelligence (KGB) in the United States. Fomin asked Scali to relay a message to the latter's "contact" (understood to be Secretary Rusk) at the department. The message was a Soviet proposal to withdraw the offensive missiles from Cuba in

NAH, VFP-62



Cdr. William B. Ecker, Commanding Officer of VFP-62, congratulates Capt. John I. Hudson, USMCR, for "chalking up another chicken" after a successful photo flight. Hudson was one of four Marine pilots of Marine Composite Reconnaissance Squadron 2 assigned to the Navy squadron. Behind the pilots is an F8U-1P stenciled with a likeness of Castro and a number of chickens, each of which depicts a successful aerial reconnaissance mission over Cuba.

---

exchange for President Kennedy's promise not to invade Cuba. As expected, Scali passed on the information.

Other developments that day were not so positive and indeed seemed ominous. Counterintelligence agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation warned the White House that the Soviets were burning documents at their embassy in Washington and their UN enclave on Long Island. The burning of diplomatic and other secret papers often, in the past, meant war was imminent.

Around 1800 EDT, President Kennedy received a message from Premier Khrushchev. The Soviet leader proposed in a lengthy statement that his government would withdraw the offensive missiles and destroy their launch sites in Cuba if the United States would lift the blockade and agree not to invade the island. This message, of course, was similar to the one Scali received.

The EXCOM was unsure how to interpret these two communications. Even though Khrushchev appeared willing to negotiate, the Soviets continued working on the missile sites in Cuba. Was the message another deception? The president and his chief advisors kept the message to themselves and awaited further developments.

The U.S.-Soviet confrontation at sea came to a head on 27 October when the tanker *Groznyy*, carrying ammonia, approached the quarantine

line. Washington feared that Moscow intended to test the quarantine with this ship, which Navy patrol planes had picked up the previous day but then lost track of. Responding to a Navy request for assistance, SAC assigned Air Force RB-47 aircraft to the seaborne search effort and deployed them to the naval station on Bermuda. On the morning of the 27th, one of the RB-47s crashed on take-off, killing the four-man crew, but one of the other planes spotted *Groznyy* north of the Virgin Islands and heading for Cuba. After radioing the location of the tanker, the RB-47 made simulated bombing runs on the ship to stop her—to no avail. *Groznyy* also failed to respond when a Navy destroyer, vectored to the tanker, signaled her to stop.

The tension rose when Admiral Dennison ordered U.S. ships on the scene to load their five-inch guns with live ammunition. CINCLANT soon ordered the destroyers to clear their guns by firing them into the sea away from the tanker. This fire, along with a few star shell illumination rounds close aboard the tanker, persuaded the Soviet captain to stop. Soon after he radioed Moscow for instructions, his ship put about and left the quarantine zone.

Not only was tension high at sea during this episode but in Washington. Both Admiral Anderson and Secretary McNamara monitored the incident from the Navy's Flag

Plot command center in the Pentagon. Dennison radioed for additional instructions after ordering his destroyers to load their weapons. Before the CNO responded, McNamara asked him, "What happens if *Groznyy* does not stop?" Anderson replied that the quarantine instructions plainly stated that if a ship continued to proceed after the proper warnings, the U.S. warships would stop her by shooting away the vessel's rudder. McNamara heatedly informed Anderson that the Navy would take no such action against Soviet ships without his and the president's authorization. After almost a week of high tension, nerves were taut all around.

A climax to the crisis approached on the morning of Saturday, 27 October, when the EXCOM met to consider the president's response to Khrushchev's communication. McCone and Lundahl opened the meeting with a sobering report that all of the MRBM sites were now operational, that work continued at a furious pace at the IRBM sites, and that the Il-28s were being assembled. Still, there was consensus that a positive reply to Khrushchev's letter was the best course of action.

Then, a second message from Khrushchev arrived that cast a shadow over the EXCOM. This time, the mercurial Soviet leader demanded that U.S. missiles be withdrawn from Turkey in exchange for similar Soviet action with regard to Cuba.



---

Some EXCOM members felt that Khrushchev might be losing control of the Kremlin, or that the hard-liners wanted more concessions from Kennedy.

Soon after receipt of the second troubling message, more bad news arrived at the White House. The Air Force informed the president that a U-2 on a routine air sampling mission accidentally flew over northeastern Siberia. The Soviets immediately scrambled fighter aircraft to intercept the reconnaissance plane. The American pilot and his plane escaped, but the incident further heightened tensions in Moscow and Washington.

The morning continued to go badly. Over eastern Cuba, a SAM battery shot down an Air Force U-2, killing the pilot, Major Rudolf Anderson. This seemed to signal another change in Soviet policy. Another report stated that Cubans had fired on the low-level photo missions that day.

With these developments as a backdrop, that afternoon the Joint Chiefs proposed that not later than Monday, 29 October, the United States initiate air strikes against Cuba. Then, seven days later, the U.S. armed forces would invade the island by air and sea.

With the prospect of conflict increasing dramatically, Kennedy decided to respond to Khrushchev's first communication, the more reasonable of the two. At the president's request, his brother Robert met

with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin late that evening. The attorney general informed Dobrynin that the United States government would accept Khrushchev's offer to remove the missiles from Cuba and in return would make a public pledge not to invade Cuba. Robert Kennedy emphasized that if the Soviet government agreed to the American proposal, it must do so quickly, otherwise the United States would be compelled to remove the missiles by force. He also mentioned that for some time the president had been considering the withdrawal of the U.S. IRBMs from Turkey and that this would occur in the near future. The attorney general made it clear, however, that the removal of the missiles in Turkey was not public information, and if the Soviets violated this "secret" agreement, the entire deal was off. In short, President Kennedy was suggesting that the United States was making its final offer to settle the crisis.

That same day, correspondent John Scali had his second meeting with KGB officer Fomin. Scali accused Fomin of a "stinking double cross," stalling for time, and playing him for a fool. The Soviet insisted that the offer he had transmitted was legitimate and that he would contact Moscow directly. According to one historian of the crisis, Scali's outburst helped convince Khrushchev that the Americans would not brook further delay or posturing.

Capping the day's events and indicating the gravity of the situation, the ships of Task Group Alfa closed in on a Soviet submarine (contact C-19) first located on the 26th. To signal the undersea vessel that American naval forces were aware of her presence, sailors on the destroyer *Cony* dropped five hand grenades over the side. The sound from these exploding grenades could be easily picked up by the submarine's sonar. Three hours later, the Foxtrot-class boat surfaced and identified herself as the Soviet naval vessel *Korabl' (Ship X)*. Escorted by several U.S. warships, the submarine proceeded at slow speed on an easterly heading into the open Atlantic.

As the sun rose on Sunday, 28 October, the armed might of the United States was prepared for all likely contingencies. Polaris submarines and SAC bombers and ICBMs stood ready to incinerate the Soviet Union if its leaders launched a direct attack on the United States. U.S. Atlantic Fleet carrier, surface, and attack submarine forces, with Canadian naval units in support, were deployed in strength in the Atlantic and Caribbean. Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps tactical fighter and attack squadrons remained on alert at bases in the southern United States. Army airborne, infantry, and armored divisions, as well as Marine Corps landing forces, awaited an order to start the invasion of Cuba. Although

the president temporarily suspended U-2 flights over the island after Anderson's loss, Navy and Air Force reconnaissance aircraft, with heavily armed fighters flying in support off the Cuban coast, continued to execute low-level photo missions.

Also at full alert were Soviet and Cuban forces on the island. In addition to the MRBM, IRBM, and SAM batteries, the Soviets had ready for battle in Cuba four regimental combat groups equipped with tanks, armored personnel carriers, antitank missiles, and Luna (FROG)

tactical rockets. Unknown to U.S. intelligence, tactical nuclear warheads for the Lunas had been stockpiled in Cuba. The Soviet military commander in Cuba was authorized to use the short-range weapons to defeat an amphibious invasion by American forces. In addition to the Soviet units, the Cubans fielded a regular force of 75,000, a reserve force of 100,000, and a militia of 100,000.

As official Washington anxiously waited, shortly after 0900 EDT on 28 October, a message started coming in from Moscow. Even though

the communication arrived in several parts, the opening paragraphs made it clear that Khrushchev had accepted the president's proposal. The Soviets would withdraw their missiles from Cuba. The likelihood of war, either a global nuclear conflagration or a devastating Caribbean conflict, was greatly diminished.

Photographed by an American P2V Neptune, probably from VP-5, Soviet Foxtrot-class submarine 911 heads due east into the Atlantic. For 35 hours, the submerged *F 911* tried to evade detection by U.S. forces. Destroyer *Charles P. Cecil* (DDR 835) and patrol planes never lost contact with the submarine, however, finally forcing the Soviet boat to surface for a battery recharge.

USN 711198



# Enforcing the Settlement



This photo of an MRBM site at San Cristobal taken on 27 October by a Navy Crusader, from an altitude of about 500 feet, clearly shows that the missile battery is operational. The Cuban Missile Crisis reached a climax that day.

The crisis had passed and the world soon breathed easier, but the international confrontation would not end until both sides carried out their ends of the agreement. And, until the end of October, Washington was not certain that the Soviets would do so. Low-level reconnaissance revealed that while some missile erectors were taken from the launch pads, the construction and camouflaging of support facilities and equipment proceeded. In addition, Soviet technicians continued to uncrate and assemble more of the Il-28 bombers, which Washington considered offensive weapons.

The situation remained tense at sea. On 29 October, *Charles P. Cecil* (DDR 835) located and stayed on top of a submerged Soviet submarine (contact C-20), despite the best efforts of the boat to evade her pursuer. Finally, after enduring thirty-five hours of constant surveillance with active sonar, the Foxtrot-class boat surfaced and proceeded due east. Patrol aircraft shadowed and photographed the vessel, identified as Soviet submarine *F 911*.

Another boat (contact C-18), trailed by *Keppler*, surfaced on 30 October. The submarine's crew had painted out the numbers on her sail, but

naval intelligence still was able to identify the unit as *F 945*. Because the submarine did not submerge again once free of the quarantine area, the normal practice, the Americans concluded that the vessel had suffered a serious mechanical failure. Thus, as the boat shaped a northeasterly course on the surface, U.S. naval vessels and aircraft had ample opportunity to photograph and observe their maritime opponent.

Another problem that developed was Castro's displeasure over the Soviet retrenchment and opposition to the terms of the U.S.-Soviet understanding. Castro stated



that agreements between the U.S. and the Soviet Union did not apply to Cuba. He threatened to shoot down any U.S. reconnaissance aircraft spotted over the island. Moreover, in contrast to the Soviets, the Cubans would not allow on-site inspection of the missile sites in their country by a neutral party. The most Castro would agree to was a 30 October visit to Havana by U Thant, Secretary General of the United Nations.

As Washington analyzed the Soviet and Cuban reactions to the Kennedy-Khrushchev understanding, naval forces maintained their vigil in the Atlantic and the Caribbean. U.S. and Canadian units continued to monitor the broad expanse of the Atlantic. On 31 October, the destroyer escort *Calcaterra* (DER 390) took over from *Mills* (DER 383) the shadowing of Soviet tanker *Terek*. In addition, to lower the number of ships needed at sea, Admiral Dennison ordered the fleet to move the quarantine line closer to Cuba. During 30-31 October, Task Force 136 took up positions on the new line, codenamed "Chestnut," that ran northwest from Puerto Rico along the Atlantic side of the Bahamas. An antisubmarine HUK group operated about 150 miles northeast of the center of this new line.

Finally, on 1 November, American intelligence gained indications that the Soviets and the Cubans would adhere to the terms of the Kennedy-Khrushchev understanding.

Aerial photographs resulting from that day's low-level reconnaissance missions over the island revealed an astonishing number of changes. Overnight, the Soviets had removed many of the missiles and erectors, crated their launching stands, and even begun the destruction of the launch pads. Clearly, the Soviets were complying with the Kennedy-Khrushchev agreement. Furthermore, despite Castro's hostile rhetoric, his forces did not fire on the Navy, Marine, and Air Force photoreconnaissance planes.

While these developments were encouraging,

Washington considered it essential, given Khrushchev's earlier duplicity, to verify the removal of Soviet offensive weapons from Cuba. In fact, it was vital that the United States be confident that all missiles, Beagle bombers, and other systems were withdrawn. Moreover, potentially dangerous Soviet submarines still prowled the waters near the quarantine line and in the Atlantic and had to be closely watched. In this effort, which lasted through the end of November, the U.S. Navy was a prominent player.

Khrushchev's representatives at the United



Navy, Marine, and Air Force aviators discuss their low-level reconnaissance missions over Cuba, reflecting the multiservice nature of operations during the missile crisis. Pictured left to right: Lt. Col. Joseph O'Grady, commander of the Air Force's 29th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron; Cdr. William B. Ecker, who led the Navy's VFP-62; and Capt. John I. Hudson of Marine Reconnaissance Composite Squadron 2. Behind them is the nose of an Air Force RF-101 Voodoo and the forward section of a Navy F8U-1P Crusader.

Nations reported that the Soviets had deployed 42 MRBMs to the island but that establishment of the U.S. quarantine had stopped the delivery of any IRBMs. With regard to verifying the dismantling of the weapon systems and their withdrawal by sea, the diplomats stated that Soviet authorities would assist the U.S. surveillance effort. In short order, the Soviets supplied a list of ships carrying the missiles from Cuba and their departure dates. Furthermore, the Soviets promised to carry the missiles as deck cargo and allow U.S. Navy ships and aircraft to move in close for accurate observation. The U.S. State Department then informed the Soviets of selected "alongside" points where U.S. Navy ships would inspect the outgoing Soviet freighters.

Beginning in early Novem-

ber, Navy, Marine, and Air Force low-level reconnaissance planes flew numerous missions over the Cuban launch sites, roads to the coast, and major ports. These flights clearly recorded the movement of the MRBMs and related equipment to the ports and the loading of Soviet merchantmen.

On 5 November, the first Soviet ships sailed from Mariel, and during the remainder of the week, another seven Soviet ships carrying missiles did the same. While several vessels did not depart when U.S. officials were told they would, there was no way for the Soviets to evade the "alongside" inspection force. U.S. naval surface and air units observed each of the missile-carrying ships closely. The Navy monitored the ships not only on their passage

through the quarantine area but in the Mediterranean and even the Black Sea. Admiral Anderson wanted to make sure he could tell the president that all the missiles were "back in Russia."

Most Soviet merchant ship captains cooperated with the surveillance and inspection regime, but some tested the system. For example, the master of freighter *Bratsk* tried unsuccessfully to avoid the alongside inspection area. In another instance, the master of the freighter *Volgoles* refused several requests to remove tarpaulins covering missiles stowed on his deck when U.S. destroyer *Vesole* (DDR 878) came alongside. *Vesole's* commanding officer,

Soviet freighter *Bratsk*, photographed near the Bahamas by Lt. Kelsey Goodman from his HSS-2 helicopter of *Wasp's* Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron 3, carries military vehicles and covered missiles aft of the lifeboats.



NAH, Cuba Ops. 1962



An Air Force RF-101 Voodoo, whose shadow can be seen at the bottom of this aerial photo, overflies a Soviet freighter, probably *Fizik Kurchatov*, in Casilda Port, Cuba, on 6 November 1962. Seen on her deck are six tarpaulin-covered missiles. By such means, U.S. intelligence verified the removal of Soviet offensive weapons from the island.

USN 711204



As a Navy P2V Neptune armed with general purpose bombs overflies the scene, U.S. destroyer *Vesole* steams alongside the Soviet freighter *Volgoles* to get a close look at her deck cargo. Only after U.S. authorities contacted Soviet representatives at the UN did the master of this freighter have his crewmen remove the tarpaulins to reveal dismantled missiles.

VOLGOLES ENR USSR 9 NOVEMBER



A P2V Neptune of Patrol Squadron 18 and another U.S. plane fly past the starboard quarter of Soviet freighter *Okhotsk* in December 1962. Visible on deck are crates containing the fuselages of Il-28 Beagle bombers being returned to the Soviet Union from Cuba.



NA 428-N-1065352

Captain Richard S. White III, immediately dispatched a message reporting this development through the naval command structure. It soon reached the United Nations, where Soviet representatives suggested that after a short period of time the destroyer captain again contact *Volgoles*. When *Vesole* next signaled the Soviet ship, her crewmen promptly uncovered the missiles.

In another incident, guided missile destroyer *Biddle* (DDG 5) steamed so close to *Leninsky Komsomol* to photograph the ship that the

Soviet captain sounded a warning horn. *Biddle* maintained her position to finish the task. The Soviet captain protested by loudspeaker. The destroyer's captain, Commander Paul Roth, responded through a Russian-speaking officer by inviting the Soviet to lunch. The latter replied that unfortunately he had other plans.

Not every interception was a tense affair, however. Later in the operation, a helicopter from *Wasp* (CVS 18) intercepted the Soviet ship

Destroyers of the multinational quarantine force (Task Force 137) sortie from Trinidad, West Indies, on 12 November. Pictured left to right: Venezuelan ARV *Zulia* (D 21), USS *Mullinix* (DD 944), Argentine ARA *Rosales* (D 22) and ARA *Espora* (D 21), and Venezuelan ARV *Nueva Esparta* (D 11).



*Alapayevsk*. Although listed by the Soviets as a missile carrier, *Alapayevsk* carried only support vehicles on deck. Non-sailors, probably missile technicians, were on the deck sunning themselves. Crewmen of the American aircraft exchanged pleasantries with the Soviets and one officer even lowered a line to which was fastened his Navy tie clasp. In return, the Soviets sent up a bottle of vodka.

The arrival of additional naval forces in the quarantine area made it even less likely



Capt. Rodderick O. Middleton, Chief of Staff to Commander Carrier Division 4, holds the bottle of vodka he received from the crew of Soviet freighter *Alapayevsk*. Standing with him (left to right) are Lt. John H. Slough, a Russian language interpreter; Lcdr. Thermon L. Ray, copilot of the HSS-2, to their rear; and Cdr. John M. Wondergem, pilot of the helo and Commanding Officer of Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron 3.

that Soviet merchantmen could avoid close inspection. Beginning on 12 November, a multinational destroyer force, designated Task Force 137, operated out of the U.S. Navy base at Trinidad. As an expression of solidarity among the nations of the Western Hemisphere, the Argentine destroyers *ARA Rosales* and *ARA Espora* and the Venezuelan ships *ARV Zulia* and *ARV Nueva Esparta* steamed in company with U.S. destroyer *Mullinix* (DD 944). Completing one mission before the end of the quarantine, the task force patrolled the eastern Caribbean looking



USN 711201

A Soviet Foxtrot-class submarine, with "Red Star" ensign flying, proceeds on the surface near the quarantine line on 9 November 1962. Soviet sailors in the conning tower watch as the U.S. patrol plane photographing their submarine's passage flies by.

for Cuba-bound shipping.

Meanwhile in the Atlantic, U.S. and Canadian forces continued to monitor Soviet surface ship and submarine movements. Canadian planes located the Soviet intelligence trawler *Shkval* about 500 miles southwest of Argentina, Newfoundland, just to the east of the sub-air barrier. The Royal Canadian Navy frigate HMCS *Inch Arran* soon shadowed the trawler.

Lajes-based U.S. Navy patrol planes tracked the Soviet tug *Pamir* as she rendezvoused with the disabled sub *F 945*, the latter already under watch by U.S. destroyer *Keppler*. *Pamir* crowded *Keppler*, trying to keep the American ship away from the submarine. After several evasive maneuvers by *Keppler*, *Pamir's* captain gave up his fruitless effort. *Keppler* stayed within 2,500 yards of the crippled Soviet sub.

Not only such occurrences at sea but differing interpretations of the Soviet-American understanding had the potential to destabilize the situation. For instance, the Soviets initially balked at categorizing their Il-28 bombers as offensive weapons and their special representative to the

UN, Vasily Kuznetsov, warned that Castro might react irrationally if these aircraft were withdrawn from Cuba. John J. McCloy, Kuznetsov's American counterpart, then observed that failure to remove the bombers or any hostile Cuban actions would be viewed by Washington as an unfriendly act. Kuznetsov understood the meaning of this communication: get the bombers out of Cuba and control Castro, or risk reheating the confrontation. The Soviets soon agreed to remove the bombers as well as the missiles.

For several weeks after 15 November, when President Kennedy ended regular low-level reconnaissance missions over Cuba, U.S. photographic planes periodically overflew the embarkation ports. In this way, U.S. leaders ensured that the Soviets lived up to their agreement and removed the bombers.

Following the agreement to withdraw the Il-28s, the crisis wound down quickly. On 20 November, President Kennedy announced an immediate end to the quarantine. Admiral Dennison ordered his Atlantic Fleet ships to return

to home ports or normal operating areas. U.S. and Canadian ships ceased shadowing Soviet warships, even though some surface and air patrol units continued to observe and photograph the three Soviet merchantmen hauling the bombers from Cuba. The photographic evidence of this surveillance effort confirmed the removal of the last Soviet offensive weapons from Castro's island. At least for the U.S. Navy, the Cuban Missile Crisis was now over.

Holding up his end of the agreement with Khrushchev, Kennedy disavowed any intention to invade Cuba and drew down U.S. forces deployed to the southern United States in readiness to attack the island. The president also relaxed the alert posture of the Polaris and SAC strategic deterrence forces. In April 1963, Kennedy completed the "secret" part of the agreement and withdrew American IRBMs from both Turkey and Italy. By then, the missiles were not needed because the Navy had committed several Polaris submarines to support NATO partners. The Navy could provide a local nuclear shield for America's allies from politically neutral international waters.



# Conclusion

---

**T**he Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was a classic demonstration of the importance of naval forces in the modern international security environment. The Navy's ballistic missile submarine fleet, and the Air Force's land-based ballistic missile and bomber units, possessed overwhelming power for destruction. Not only were the Polaris submarines virtually invisible and invulnerable as they awaited launch orders under many fathoms of ocean water, but they could maneuver close to the enemy homeland before unleashing their terrible weapons. The existence and readiness of this strategic arsenal clearly helped President Kennedy dissuade the Soviets from brandishing their much weaker nuclear sword.

The strength and versatility of Admiral Dennison's Atlantic Fleet also lessened the chance that Khrushchev would mount a conventional challenge at sea. U.S. aircraft carriers, attack submarines, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, and shore-based patrol squadrons so dominated the waters of the Atlantic and the Caribbean that Soviet surface warships remained in their home waters. Furthermore, American and Canadian ASW forces kept Soviet submarines, the only real seaborne threat in 1962, under such close surveillance that hostile action on their part would have been suicidal.

In addition, the U.S. forces

under Admiral Dennison, the unified Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Command, were clearly superior to Soviet and Cuban conventional forces in the Caribbean, and this fact undoubtedly influenced decision making in Moscow and Havana. Navy carriers loaded with fighter and attack aircraft, cruisers and destroyers bristling with 8-inch and 5-inch guns, and amphibious ships crowded with Marines and their weapons stood ready to bring war to the Cuban littoral. Reinforced by Navy ships and Air Force transport aircraft, Marine units already ashore at Guantanamo were prepared to support any invasion. And, no more than a few hundred miles away in southern Florida and other staging

areas in the American South, Army airborne, infantry, and armor divisions and Air Force air defense and tactical combat wings were poised.

The president found U.S. naval forces valuable not only for deterring nuclear or conventional conflict, but for enabling him to manage a crisis without resorting to aggression. The fleet's presence on the seaward approaches to Cuba allowed him to place the onus of any military escalation on Khrushchev. Kennedy did not need the permission of any multinational organization or single nation to deploy these forces. The strength and effectiveness of the U.S. naval quarantine, however, made it militarily and politically acceptable for member states of the OAS to join the effort.

NA 428-N-1065221B



Adm. Robert L. Dennison awards Lt. (jg) William L. Taylor, a VFP-62 pilot, the Distinguished Flying Cross for his execution of low-level reconnaissance flights over Cuba. Taylor and his comrades in the Navy's aviation squadrons demonstrated great bravery and professional skill in their missions, which were critical to the successful resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

Freedom of the sea also allowed Canadian and British naval units to take part in the surveillance effort without negotiating a political agreement. Moreover, the fleet was able to remain on station—*Independence* operated for 54 days at sea—because of continuous replenishment by naval logistic ships. This capability made it possible for the president to mount and maintain the de facto blockade of Cuba.

Intelligence collection, including that done by the Navy, proved to be another vital resource for the president in his management of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Satellites and U-2 aircraft helped

assure Kennedy that the United States had a decided edge over the Soviet Union in terms of nuclear weapons. CIA and Air Force U-2s unmasked Khrushchev's ploy to establish Cuba as a launching pad for medium and intermediate-range missiles and bombers. Low-level reconnaissance planes, especially the Navy's first-rate units, supplied the EXCOM with critical intelligence on Soviet and Cuban combat forces and defenses on the island. They also monitored the dismantling, transportation to ports, and loading onto merchantmen of the worrisome MRBMs and Il-28 bombers. Finally, Navy long-range

patrol squadrons and surface ships enabled Washington to verify Soviet compliance with the terms of the Kennedy-Khrushchev understanding that resolved this most terrifying crisis of the Cold War.

The president and the nation were grateful for the Navy's contribution to the peaceful resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The sailors and aircrewmen of over 250 warships, aviation squadrons, and support units earned the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal. As Admiral Anderson promised, the Navy did not let the president down.

---

## Acknowledgements

---

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of several groups and individuals who aided in the preparation of this work. The staffs of the Prints and Photographs Division and the Map and Geography Division, both of the Library of Congress, and the National Archives Still Picture Branch provided critical materials for the project. I am especially grateful to Dr. Dean C. Allard, Director of Naval History; Captain Clete Wise, USN, Deputy Director; and Dr. William S. Dudley, Senior Historian, for their continued support of this project. The series editor, Dr. Edward J. Marolda, provided immeasurable assistance and support in preparing this first volume of a new series. My thanks also go to Professor Betty Miller Unterberger of the Secretary of the Navy's Advisory Committee; Commander Joseph F. Bouchard, USN; Captain William B. Ecker, USN (Ret.); Sean Maloney; Dino A. Brugioni; and Beatriz Betancourt Hardy for their comments and advice. My coworkers in the Naval Historical Center also provided tremendous assistance in their various special-

ties, including Sandra K. Russell, editor, Charles C. Cooney, art director, and Joan A. Frasher, typesetter, Naval Aviation News Branch; Chuck Haberlein and Ed Finney, Photo Section; Gina Akers, John L. Hodges, Kathleen M. Lloyd and Mike Walker, Operational Archives; John C. Reilly, Jr., and Doreen T. German, Ships' History Branch; Ella Nargele, Information Security Specialist; Glenn E. Helm, Navy Department Library; John Barnett, Navy Art Collection Branch; and Steven D. Hill, Naval Aviation History Branch.

The advice, information, and comments offered by my colleagues in the Contemporary History Branch—Jeffrey G. Barlow, Robert J. Cressman, Richard A. Russell, Robert J. Schneller, and Gary E. Weir—were of inestimable value. Most importantly, I want to thank my wife, Ruth, herself a historian. Despite the proximity of our wedding date, she generously reviewed and commented on the early drafts, substantially improving and clarifying the author's sometimes arcane account.

## About the Author

---

Curtis A. Utz is currently a historian in the Naval Historical Center's Contemporary History Branch. He graduated from the University of Maryland where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in history in 1984. He served as a historical interpretation technician with the National Park Service and an intern at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum. In 1989, he completed a Master of Arts degree in history at the University of Maryland. Mr. Utz has worked as a free-lance military historian and researcher. The *Maryland Historian* has published his works. Behind Mr. Utz is the destroyer *Barry* (DD 933), a ship on permanent display at the Washington Navy Yard and a veteran of Cuban Missile Crisis operations.



J01 (SW) Eric Sessit

## Suggested Readings

---

Abel, Elie. *The Missile Crisis*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966.

Brugioni, Dino A. *Eyeball to Eyeball: The Inside Story of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York: Random House, 1991.

Garthoff, Raymond L. *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Washington: Brookings Institute, 1987.

"The Cuban Missile Crisis: Oral History." *Naval History*, Winter 1992.

Young, Maj. John M. *When the Russians Blinked: The U.S. Maritime Response to the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Washington: History and Museum Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 1991.



